







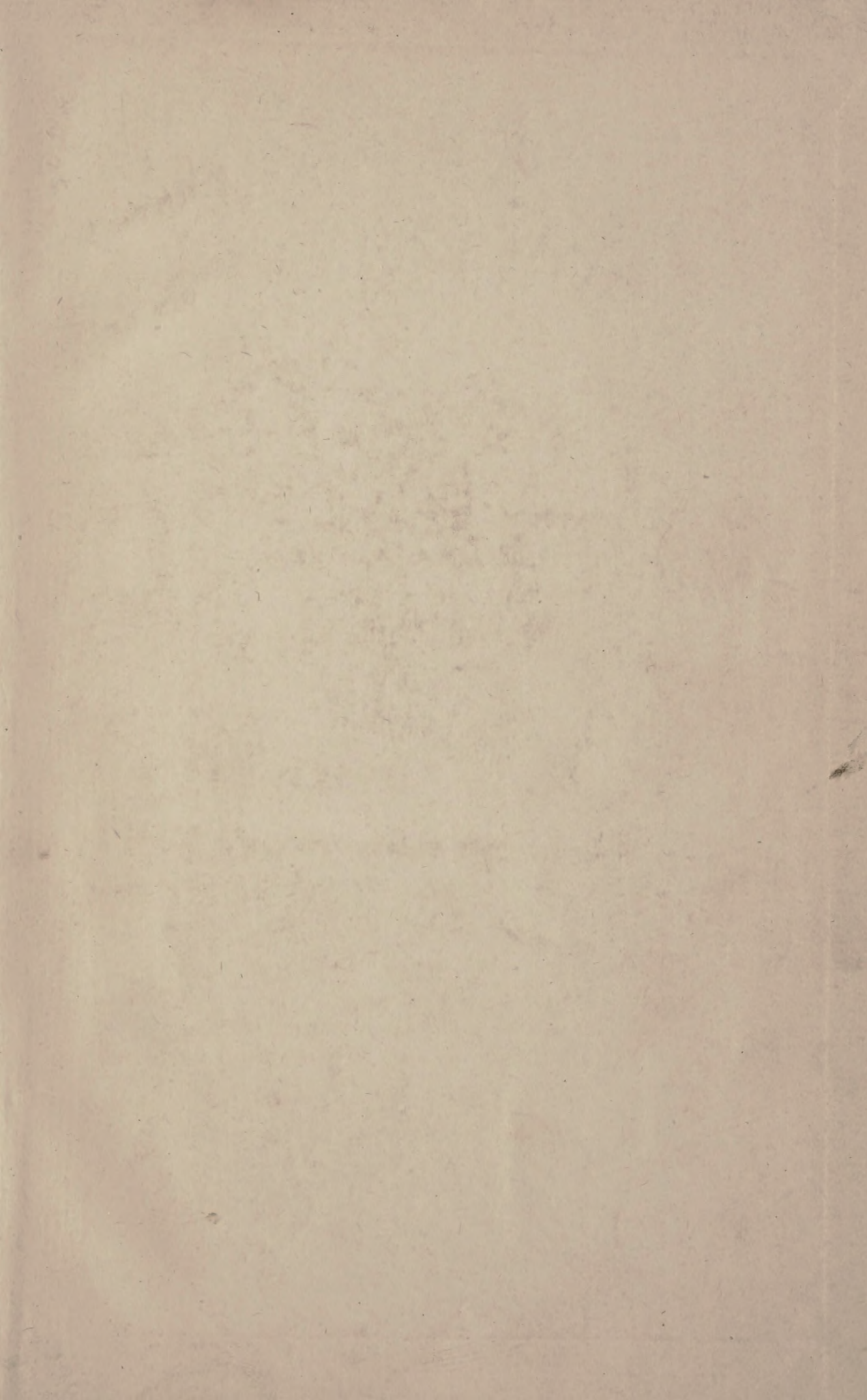
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BEGAN TO STARE AT THE NEXT LETTER HE OPENED. —  
*Page 163.*



# MAIL ORDER FRANK

Or

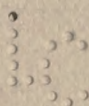
A Smart Boy and His Chances

BY

ALLEN CHAPMAN

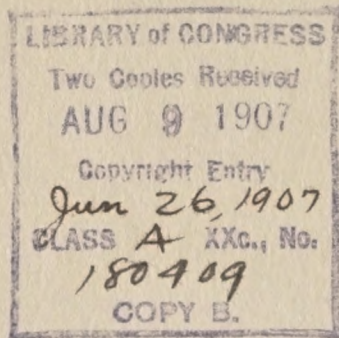
AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG EXPRESS AGENT," "TWO BOY  
PUBLISHERS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK  
CUPPLES & LEON CO.





## BOYS OF BUSINESS SERIES

BY ALLEN CHAPMAN

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume, 60 cents,  
postpaid.

THE YOUNG EXPRESS AGENT

Or Bart Stirling's Road to Success

TWO BOY PUBLISHERS

Or From Typecase to Editor's Chair

MAIL ORDER FRANK

Or a Poor Boy and His Chances

(Other volumes in preparation.)



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MAIL ORDER FRANK



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## PREFACE.

THIS volume is the third in "The Boys of Business Series," a line in which I am endeavoring to show what bright, wide-awake youths of to-day can do in various pursuits of life.

The first volume in this series was called "The Young Express Agent," and related the doings of Bart Stirling, showing how he took his father's place in the express office, learned all the details of that business, and made a man of himself in more ways than one.

Bart had two friends, Bob and Darry Haven. The Haven brothers had a liking for the publishing business, and in the second volume of the line, "Two Boy Publishers," I told how they became the owners of a country paper and made that what all newspapers should be, a power for good in the community in which it was issued.

The Haven boys befriended a lad named Frank Newton, who was rather wild. Frank determined to turn over a new leaf, and in the present volume I have told how he did so, established himself in the



## PREFACE

mail order business, and "won out" against considerable odds.

The mail order business is to-day a tremendous one, and from small beginnings there are firms who have millions of capital invested. The majority of the mail order houses are upright and honest in their dealings but some are tricky, and I have deemed it wise to show the latter up in their true light. Frank proved honest to the core, and if the book teaches a moral it is that "honesty is the best policy."

ALLEN CHAPMAN.

*May 15, 1907.*



# Mail Order Frank

## CHAPTER I

### WAKING UP

“MOTHER, I must do something, and that right quickly.”

It was Frank Newton who was talking. His voice was composed, but determined. His face was calm, but there was a resolute look in his eyes. It told that under the surface some unusual emotion was stirring Frank.

“I don’t see how you can do any more than you are doing now,” responded his mother with an anxious sigh. “Of course it seems hard to get along with so little when we have been used to having so much. But, oh, Frank, when I think of what was once — you away, I knew not where, and my heart breaking to find out — I am grateful and happy, and so very proud of you, my dear, dear boy.”

Frank’s lip quivered at the fervent words spoken. They inspired him with their eloquence. His hand



trembled as it rested on his mother's arm gently and lovingly.

"It's worth everything to have you talk that way, mother," he said in quite a husky voice, "and kind words and good opinion just makes me the more resolved to better things."

"Don't be ungrateful or complaining, my boy."

"It's never that, mother."

"And don't be too ambitious, or too reckless. We have a roof to shield us and food to eat, thanks to your busy endeavors. The lawyer gives us hopes that we may recover something from the wreck of our lost fortune. I don't know of any better outlook for the present, than to wait patiently and see what turns up in the way of an improvement in affairs."

Frank shook his head, and paced up and down the floor of the best room of the cozy little cottage that was their present home.

"It's no use, mother," he said finally. "The lost fortune is a dream, a bubble. We may just as well get down to that. Mr. Beach, the lawyer, gives us hopes, but they are not based on much. At the same time, he takes his fees. We can't stand that any longer. I told him so, yesterday. I don't believe there is the least show in the world for our claim. I am sure that Mr. Beach shares



my opinion now. No," continued Frank definitely, "what future there is for us must be worked out by our own independent exertions."

"It is a bitter wrong then," spoke his mother. "When your father, Mr. Newton, died, he left me his town property here. When I married a second time, and Mr. Ismond became your stepfather, I had implicit confidence in him at first. He got me to sign the property over to him. Then I saw my mistake. When his tyrannical ways drove you away from home I lost all regard for him."

"He certainly was very cruel and unjust to me," murmured Frank, recalling many dark days of his young life.

"When he died," resumed Frank's mother, "I was amazed to find that all my rights to the estate were forfeited. It looked very much as though Mr. Ismond had been planning to rob us of everything when death overtook him. A man named Purnell, Gideon Purnell, held the title to our property under mortgage and sale. He sold it to Abner Dorsett, who now holds it. The law says Dorsett was an innocent purchaser, and therefore cannot be disturbed."

"Innocent!" flashed out Frank. "Oh, what a shame! Why, we know better than that, mother. We are sure that Purnell was his tool and partner."



Anyhow, we cannot hold Dorsett to make any restitution. I hope some day, though, to run across this Purnell. If I ever do, I'll not lose sight of him till I know the truth of the wicked plot that made us paupers. He, and he only, holds the key to the situation."

"Mr. Dorsett is a bad man," said the widow. "His actions show he is not just. Else, why does he care to put obstacles in your way when you seek work? I wish we could leave Greenville, Frank. That man terrifies me. He may get you into some trouble. I have seen him prowling around here often. Then, the other day, our poor, faithful dog, Christmas, disappeared. That same night I saw Dorsett crouching under the window yonder. It looks as if he fears something we may know or do, and is lurking around eavesdropping to find out what it is."

"He will find a trap set for him the next time he comes nosing around here," declared Frank with a grim-set lip. "Mother, don't worry your mind any further, I am determined to get steady work and earn more money. I wish, too, we could leave Greenville. If it was any use I would stay and fight Dorsett to the last ditch. It's no use, and I know it. Let us get out of the sight and memory of the old life. I'm going to strike out new."



"But how, what at?" inquired Mrs. Ismond, doubtfully.

"I don't know yet, I will before another sun rises, though," asserted Frank, staunchly. "That is, if good hard thinking can suggest the right way to go about it."

Frank took up his cap and walked from the house. He paused to place a silver fifty cent piece on the kitchen dresser. He had earned it before breakfast, cutting a lawn and trimming hedges up at Judge Bascom's place.

Frank had been doing such odd jobs about town for the past four months. He was courteous, accomodating and energetic. Everybody he worked for liked him, and he never shirked an honest task.

He made out fairly well as a general utility boy about the village. The worst of it was, however, that his good luck came in streaks. One very busy week Frank made over ten dollars. Then the next week all he could get to do was chopping wood at fifty cents a day.

"There is something better in me than that," Frank resolved. "I've got the problem to solve what it is, and I feel that it is up to me to figure it out right now."

Frank's face clouded slightly as he crossed the



yard and his eye fell on an empty dog house. It made Frank feel lonesome and worried to realize that its former tenant, the dog, Christmas, was missing.

The faithful animal, a veritable chum to Frank, had disappeared one night. Frank had spent two days looking for him with no results.

Christmas was a connecting link between the present and a very vivid section of the past in Frank Newton's experience. The thought of this instantly sent Frank's mind drifting among the vital and exciting incidents in that career.

Frank was a peculiar boy. He had great sturdiness of character, what some people call "nerve," and up to two years before our story begins had led a happy, joyous existence. He had been an active spirit, and always a leader in boyish sports and fun.

It had been a black day for Frank when his mother had married Ismond. Too late Mrs. Newton had learned that she had wedded a fortune-hunter. Too soon Frank discovered that the miserable schemer planned to drive him away from home, so he might more easily rob the lad's mother of her fortune.

Frank stood Ismond's abuse just as long as he could. Then he ran away from home.

At first he followed a circus, tired of it, and got a



job tending a lemonade stand at an ocean resort. He made all sorts of acquaintances, good and bad. The latter did not demoralize him, but they did harden him. He grew to be a cynical, unhappy boy.

In his wanderings Frank brought up at a town called Pleasantville. This was the home of Bart Stirling, the hero of the first volume of this series "The Young Express Agent," and of Darry and Bob Haven, whose stirring careers my former readers have followed in the volume entitled, "Two Boy Publishers."

Frank arrived at Pleasantville in the company of two men, who had devised a great fraud upon the meanest but richest man in the place, Colonel Harrington. In disgust of their swindling ways, Frank destroyed the papers they hoped to impose upon the colonel. In escaping from them he was severely crippled and laid up for several weeks.

Soon his money gave out. He was turned away from the village hotel for not paying his board.

He proved a boy of ready resources, however. Bob Haven formed his acquaintance in the midst of one of his original and daring schemes for raising money quickly.

Frank paid up his debts and hung around Pleas-



antville, living upon his surplus. He was at a stage of his career where he was sick of change and adventures. He longed for home. In the friendship of the Haven boys and Bart Stirling, he began slowly to feel his way back to a natural boyhood plane.

One night a terrible fire burned down the Pleasantville Hotel. It needed just such an incident to rouse up in Frank the latent chivalry and courage of his fine soul. At the risk of his life he saved fourteen inmates penned up in the burning attic of the hotel, by helping them across a plank leading into an adjoining building. He braved death again by going back into the roaring flames to save a little sleeping chld.

Frank rescued the child, but at fearful cost. He was dreadfully burned, almost blinded. For weeks he lay at the town hospital, hovering betwixt life and death. When he finally recovered, it was to learn that the town had gone wild over his heroism. In the paper they owned called the *Pleasantville Weekly Herald*, the Haven boys had given him "a write up" that had thrilled the community.

More than that, Frank's friends had learned that the name they had known him by, Percy St. Clair, was an assumed one. They accidentally discovered his real name, sent word to his native



town, and when the injured hero awoke to health again it was to find his devoted mother at his side, nursing him.

Frank now learned that he was some good in the world, after all. The ovation of the grateful and enthusiastic town folks, the loyal, hearty friendship of such comrades as Bart Stirling and Darry and Bob Haven warmed his heart to some of its old-time cheer and courage. The day he left Pleasantville with his mother for their home at Greenville, Frank Newton stepped over the threshold of a new life.

An episode of Frank's departure was the acquisition of Christmas. This faithful canine Bart Stirling had adopted when he was homeless. Haven Brothers had later employed him to run the pony press in their amateur job printing office. Frank loved dogs, and Christmas had taken a great fancy to him.

The animal whined and ran after Frank when he set out for the train. Frank drove Christmas back, but it was only to find the loyal dog hidden under the car seat, twenty miles on the homeward trip.

When they reached Greenville, Frank wrote about Christmas to his Pleasantville friends. His letter, however, showed his half-hidden reluctance



towards giving up the faithful old dog. Haven Brothers made Frank a present of Christmas by return mail.

Of all this Frank now thought as he made his way towards the business centre of Greenville.

"Hey there, Frank Newton, the very fellow!"

Frank looked up quickly. A rapid voice had interrupted his reverie. Its owner was a Mr. Buckner, a local insurance agent and real estate man.

Mr. Buckner's office sided on the street where Frank was walking. From its open window the proprietor beckoned animatedly.

"Want me?" called up Frank.

"Sure, if you can hustle," retorted Mr. Buckner.

"I can always do that if there's anything in it," was the laughing rejoinder.

Frank crossed the street at a bound, darted around to the front of the building, and was up the stairs four steps at a time.



## CHAPTER II

### A FIVE-DOLLAR JOB

FRANK found Mr. Buckner at his desk, tearing out a freshly-written slip from his check book.

"Good — sit down," said the business man. "Ready in a second. Now then," he added a minute later, after filling out a receipt blank, "want to make five dollars?"

"A week?" smiled Frank.

"A day — an hour, if you can get the action on this job that quick," responded Buckner briskly. "See here, Frank," he continued, consulting his watch, "a certain individual started down that south road yonder in his buggy for Riverton half-an-hour ago."

"Yes, sir," nodded Frank.

"How soon can he get there?"

"Horse any good?" questioned Frank.

"No, common every-day hack."

"Well," calculated Frank, "it's fifteen miles around by that road. Taking it fairly easy, he'd get to Riverton in about two hours and a-half."



"Very good," said Buckner. "Can you do it in less time?"

"On foot?"

"Any way, so you get there."

"Sure," said Frank confidently. "I can make it in an hour by crossing the flats."

"Aha!" observed Buckner, "I see."

"Direct across the swamp stretch it is barely six miles to Riverton," went on Frank.

"But there's no road?"

"Except the trail us boys have blazed out from time to time," explained Frank, his eyes brightening at the memory of many a famous camping out experience in "the Big Woods." "I can bike it four miles, wade one, and there's only an easy mile stretch to come after that."

"U-um," muttered Mr. Buckner in a musing tone, half to himself. "I'd rather not excite the suspicions of a certain person already on the road, so your suggestion strikes me very good, Frank. Will you guarantee to get to Riverton first?"

"I will — with time to spare," promised Frank, readily.

"I rely on you, then. It is quite an important matter. Here is a check for two hundred dollars. It is made payable to James Pryor. He is a fire insurance adjuster at Riverton, with an office over the



bank there. You find him out, hand him that check, get him to sign this receipt, and your work is done."

"That's easy," said Frank with a pleasant smile.

"It isn't worth five dollars, though."

"I'm doing this hiring," retorted Buckner with a quizzical laugh. "Client's money, see? By the way, too, do this little commission up trim and neat, and there will be some more work for you from the same party."

Frank was mightily pleased at his task and the prospects. He stowed the check and receipt in a safe pocket, and started to leave the office.

"My client wants to buy up some salvage from a fire at Riverton," Mr. Buckner explained.

"I see," nodded Frank.

"A certain party here has been juggling with the situation. He put in a lot of dummy bids. We learned what his best bid was, and offered the same amount. Just now we got a letter — as he did also — accepting first payment from either of us. By the way, too," continued Mr. Buckner, with a queer twinkle in his eye, "when you come to find who it is you have helped to outwit, you may experience a decided personal pleasure in the discovery. Report soon as you get back to Greenville, Frank."



"That will be one o'clock at the latest," pledged the boy.

He glanced at the clock, and was down the stairs quicker than he had come up them. Frank was back home in a jiffy. He made a brief explanation to his mother. Getting out his bicycle he tied to the handles a pair of long rubber boots. Soon he was sailing down the road to the south.

The Big Woods formed a long six-mile barrier between Greenville and Riverton direct. Its centre was practically impassible during wet seasons. It was a dismal, slushy waste. For this reason the only road to Riverton wound in a semi-circle many miles out of the natural course.

Frank entered the woods at a familiar opening near the edge of the town. For two miles there was a hard trodden path, and he made good time on his wheel. For two more, he had to pick a straggling course. Many times he had to dismount from the bicycle and run it past obstacles. However, it was not long before he reached the edge of the flats.

"Capital!" said Frank, after an eager survey of the swampy stretch. "I couldn't strike it drier. Now then, for a wade."

Frank ran his bicycle to cover, and drew on the long rubber boots. For a distance of a quarter-of-



a-mile he made ready progress by stepping from one dried-up clump of grass or reeds to another. He had to pick his course more particularly, however, as he got to the wet spots. Wading was not difficult, as the water was not deep. Only once did Frank sink above the knees.

“Whew! that was a hot tug,” panted the youth, as he reached the west slope of the flats.

Frank threw himself flat on dry ground and rested for five minutes. Then he arose and removed the rubber boots. He hid these among some bushes and resumed his travels at a lively gait.

Presently Frank was passing the vicinity of a board fence. It reached up fully fifteen feet, and its top was studded with sharp-pointed nails. Frank was not near enough to observe it more than casually. He had no time to make a closer inspection, and, past a reach of timber, it was shut out entirely from his view.

“Hello!” again he exclaimed a few minutes later, and paused this time to look across a ditch. An object of decided curiosity and interest held Frank’s attention. This was a little ragged urchin curled up fast asleep against a clump of dry weeds.

He was barefooted, and up to the knees he was spattered and caked with dry mud. His face was dust-covered, tired-looking and tear-stained.



Frank's sympathy was easily aroused. He voted the little fellow some wretched, homeless lad on a tramp.

By the side of the boy was quite a large bundle. It was enclosed in a newspaper. The breeze blew the sheets aside and the contents were disclosed quite readily to Frank's view.

"Well!" said Frank, his eyes opening wide, "he's not a vegetarian, that's sure."

The remark was called forth by a sight of a mass of cold cooked meat that might well make Frank stare, on account of its volume and variety. It looked as if the young wayfarer had gathered up a lunch for many days. There were parts of mutton chops, chunks of roast beef, and cuts of pork, flanked by bones and remnants of hash and sausages.

"Hope he's here when I come back this way," said Frank. "Looks pretty forelorn. I'd be glad to give him a lift."

Frank hurried forward now. He soon reached the outskirts of Riverton. Within ten minutes he gained the business centre of the little town. Frank located the bank. He was soon at the door of an office over it bearing the words in gilt letters:

*James Pryor, Fire Insurance.*



The door was open. Seated behind a wire railing at a desk was a cross-looking old man writing in a book. Frank approached him with the question.

"Is Mr. Pryor in?"

"Eleven," snapped out the man without looking up from his work.

"You mean he will be here at eleven o'clock?" pursued Frank.

"Yes."

"I'll wait for him then," said Frank, selecting a chair. He felt a trifle disappointed and worried. The "certain other party" was on the road to Riverton. It was part of Frank's contract to see Pryor before his arrival.

Several people came in and inquired for the insurance man during the next half-hour. Some of them went away saying they would return at eleven o'clock. Some others sat down like Frank, and waited. Frank heard the old clerk explain to one caller that Mr. Pryor was in his private room, but engaged in a most important consultation with a client.

Frank grew restless. He approached the cross-grained clerk again.

"Excuse me," he said politely, "but I understand that Mr. Pryor is in his private room."



"What of it? Can't be disturbed," snapped out his representative.

Frank retreated. He managed to endure a further tedious wait of a quarter-of-an-hour. Finally he strolled to the window looking down on the street.

"That 'other party' is on his way here," mused Frank anxiously. "Suppose he gets here before eleven o'clock? That gives him an even chance with myself. Oh, the mischief!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "Now the pot's in the fire, sure!"

Frank gave a great start, and stared fixedly at a horse and gig that came clattering to a stop just then in front of the bank.

Frank recognized the vehicle and its driver. As he did so, he as quickly guessed that this new arrival must be the "certain party" alluded to by Mr. Buckner.

The new comer was Abner Dorsett, the man who had helped to swindle Frank's mother out of her fortune.



## CHAPTER III

### A BUSINESS CALL

FRANK watched Dorsett dismount from the gig and tie his horse. He realized that he would be up into the insurance man's office in a few minutes.

"I must do something, and quickly," thought Frank. "The second that man sees me he will suspect my mission here. He is a person of substance, and will carry weight. I shall be left if he gets into action first."

Frank reflected rapidly. The old clerk, as he had already found out, was unapproachable. Frank was seized with a wild impulse to leap over the wire railing and rush past the clerk to the door of Mr. Pryor's private office.

"Maybe it's locked, though," said Frank. "No, I won't do that. I don't see that I can do much of anything, except to wait and take my chance of getting the check into Mr. Pryor's hands before Mr. Dorsett guesses what's up."

Frank glanced at the clock. It showed ten min-



utes to eleven. He went out into the hall and drew back into the shelter of a big fuel box there.

Dorsett came up the stairs, buggy whip in hand. He bustled into the office in his usual self-important way. Frank noticed that the old clerk sat down on him promptly. He was not one bit impressed with the bombastic visitor from Greenville.

Dorsett scowled as the clerk pointed to the clock, and impatiently fumbling the whip, sat down with the others in the office to await the royal pleasure of its closeted proprietor.

Frank did a lot of thinking. He planned all kinds of wild dashes when the door of that private office should open. Then, happening to stroll down the hall, a new idea was suggested to him.

"Would it win?" Frank breathlessly asked himself.

He had come out on a little landing. This was that platform of stairs running down into the rear of the lot that the bank and the insurance office occupied.

Six feet away from it to the left were two windows. They were both open. The low hum of voices reached Frank's ears. Judging from the situation of the apartment beyond, Frank was sure that he had located the insurance man's private room.



"I wonder if I dare?" he challenged himself.  
"I wonder if it would work?"

His eyes snapped and his fingers tingled. Then Frank studied the outlook more carefully. He calculated first his chances of getting to the first window. He also planned just what he would say in the way of explanation and apology once he reached it.

Two feet away from the platform a lightning rod ran straight up the building. Frank seized this. He fearlessly swung himself free of the platform, bracing his toes on a protending joint of the rod.

At the side of the nearest window, top and bottom, were two hinge standards. They had been inbedded in the solid masonry when the place was built to hold iron shutters, if such were ever needed. The bank floor below was guarded with these, but none had been put in place on the upper story.

Frank swung one hand free, and bending to a rather risky angle hooked a forefinger around the upper one of these standards. At the same time he gave his body a swing clear of his footing.

He aimed to land his feet on the sill of the nearest window. In this Frank succeeded. There was no time, however, to chance losing the foothold thus gained. He promptly slid his free hand down



under the frame of the raised window. He got a firm clutch. Relaxing his hold of the hinge standard, he stooped.

The next moment, on a decidedly reckless and awkward balance, Frank tumbled rather than dropped inside of the room that was his objective point of assault.

"Hello! what's this?" instantly hailed him.

Frank nimbly gained an upright position. He faced two men who, seated at a table covered with papers, began to push back their chairs in a somewhat startled way. They stared hard at the intruder.

Frank promptly doffed his cap. He made his most courteous bow.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said in a rather flustered way, "but which is Mr. Pryor, please?"

"I am Pryor," answered one of the twain, and Frank saw from the gathering frown on the speaker's face that a storm was brewing unless he headed it off summarily.

"I must beg your pardon, Mr. Pryor," said Frank, "but it is a matter of some business importance. I have been waiting for over an hour to see you. It won't take but a moment, sir," and Frank swiftly produced the check and the receipt entrusted to him by Mr. Buckner. Before Pryor



realized it, they were thrust into his hands and he was looking at them.

"Oh, this can wait," he said pettishly. "I don't like this kind of an intrusion, young man."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Pryor," interrupted Frank in a gentle, polite tone, "but I am only a paid messenger, and I promised Mr. Buckner to be back with that receipt at a certain time."

"So you seized the bull by the horns," broke in Pryor's companion with a great chuckle. "And outwitted old Grumper, the clerk, ha! ha! Pryor, nail the boy on a year's contract. He's got the making in him of a first-class insurance solicitor, in his originality, daring and —"

"Cheek," muttered Pryor. "Well, well — here's your receipt."

Frank seized the paper that Pryor signed with a swift scrawl of the pen, with an eagerness that was a kind of delighted rapture.

"Oh, thank you, sir," he said, "and a thousand apologies for my rude intrusion."

"Hold on," ordered Pryor, as Frank returned towards the window.

"Yes, unless you carry extra accident insurance," put in Pryor's companion. "You might not find it so easy getting out of that window as you did getting in, young fellow."



Mr. Pryor had gone to the clouded glass door, which Frank knew opened into the main office. He slipped its catch and opened it. Frank understood that he was to pass out that way. He started forward, making a deferential bow to his host.

"Hi, I say, Pryor — one minute!" sounded a voice in the outer office, and Frank wondered what was about to happen as he recognized the tones as belonging to Dorsett.

"In a few minutes," responded Pryor, with an impatient wave of his hand.

"All right. It's about the salvage business, you know," went on Dorsett from behind the wire grating. "Want to pay you the money and close up the deal."

"Oh, that?" spoke Pryor, with a sudden glance at Frank and a grim twinkle in his eyes. "You young schemer!" he said to Frank in an undertone, with a slight chuckle. "I understand your peculiar tactics, now. You'll do, decidedly, young man!"

Frank tried to look all due humility, but he could not entirely suppress a satisfied smile. As he passed out Pryor said to Dorsett: "You are too late on that matter. I have just closed the salvage business with Buckner of Greenville."

"You've what?" howled Dorsett, with a vio-



lent start. "Why, I'm here first. No one passed me on the road. I — er, hum" — Dorsett turned white as his eye fell on Frank. He glared and shook his driving whip.

The animated and interested friend of Pryor stuck his head past the open doorway.

"I say, youngster," he asked guardedly, his face all a-grin, "how did you circumvent the old chap?"

"Well, I nearly swam part of the way," explained Frank. "Thank you, Mr. Pryor," he added, as the latter opened the wire gate for him to pass out.

The old clerk had sprung to his feet, gaping in consternation at him. Pryor's friend was convulsed with internal mirth. Pryor himself did not look altogether displeased at the situation.

Frank thought that Dorsett would actually leap upon him and strike him with the whip. The latter, however, with a hoarse growl in his throat, allowed Frank to proceed on his way unhindered.

"We shall hear from this of course — my mother and I," said the youth to himself as he gained the street. "Mr. Dorsett will store this up against me, hard. All right — I've done my simple duty and I'll stand by the results."

A minute later, looking back the way he had



come, Frank saw Dorsett come threshing out into the street. He kicked a dog out of his path, rudely jostled a pedestrian, jumped into the gig and went tearing down the homeward road plying the whip and venting his cruel rage on the poor animal in the shafts.

Frank started back towards Greenville the way he had come. He was greatly pleased at his success, and cheerfully anticipated the good the five dollars would do his mother and himself.

As Frank passed the spot where he had noticed the farefooted, mud-bespattered urchin lying asleep by the side of the ditch, he could find no trace of the lad.

A little farther on Frank came in sight of the high board fence he had so curiously observed on his way to Riverton.

The wind was his way, and as he approached the queer barrier he was somewhat astonished at a great babel of canine barking and howls that greeted his ears.

"Sounds like a kennel," he reflected, "but's a big one. Why, if there isn't the little fellow with the package of meat."

Frank wonderingly regarded a tattered, forlorn figure at a distance seeming to be glued right up face forward against the fence.



The boy had piled two or three big boulders on top of one another. These he had surmounted, and was peering through a high up crack or knot hole in the fence.

On one arm he carried the newspaper package Frank had noticed. Bit by bit he poised its contents, hurling them over the fence.

A loud clamor of yelps and barkings would greet this shower of food. Frank drew nearer, mightily interested.

The little fellow would throw over a bone and peer inside the enclosure.

"Get it, Fido!" Frank heard him shout. "They won't let him — those big ones," he wailed. "Oh, you dear, big fellow, help him, help him. No, they won't let him. Fido, Fido, Oh, my! oh my!"

The little fellow slipped down to a seat on the boulders now and began to cry as if his heart would break. Frank approached and pulled at his arm.

"Hi, youngster," he challenged, "what in the world are you up to, anyhow?"



## CHAPTER IV

### A BREAK FOR LIBERTY

THE little ragamuffin addressed by Frank raised his dirt-creased, tear-stained face pathetically. He looked at his questioner for a moment and then went on crying harder than ever.

"Well," said Frank, "this is a queer go. Come, little son, brace up and tell what is the matter with you. Who is Fido — a dog?"

"Sure. He's in there, he's been in there for two days now, and I cannot get him out."

"There appears to be a good many dogs in there, judging from the racket," said Frank. "What kind of a place is this, anyhow?"

"It's the pound," explained the urchin. "Belongs to Riverton, but Sile Stoggs runs it. Know Stoggs?"

"I don't," answered Frank.

"He's a brute — Oh, what a brute!" cried the little fellow. "Was a constable — the mean kind. Turned a poor woman out of her house in the cold last winter. She died, and her two big brothers



met Stoggs one dark night and nearly kicked the life out of him. He had to give up business, for they crippled him."

"Go ahead," encouraged Frank.

"He had some pol — politicattle friends, I think they call it. One of them was a sharp lawyer. He raked up a lot of old ord — ordinants."

"Ordinances, I suppose you mean?" suggested Frank.

"Yes, sir, that sounds more like it,— anyway, village laws, see? They said Riverton should have a pound. They worked it so that Stoggs got the job of poundmaster. The town pays him a big rent for these old barracks. Used to be a trotting park. He drives around in a little dog cart, and picks up all the stray horses and cows he can catch. Then the owners have to pay two dollars to get them out of the pound. Stoggs gets half. Wish that was Stogg," and the boy kicked a dirt clump so hard that he stubbed his toe and winced.

"And what about the dogs?" asked Frank.

"That's a new wrinkle. About a month ago Stoggs' lawyer fished up another old law about dog license, or tax, or something of that kind. Since then he's been capturing all the dogs he could find for miles around. It wouldn't matter, if he was kind to them," went on the lad," but he isn't. He



starves them. He beats them, too awfully. And you'd ought to see the dirty old water trough where he makes them drink. Mother is poor. We can't pay any two dollars to get Fido out. But I come here every day and bring all the meat I can gather up, and feed the poor things. The trouble is, though, there is so many of them in there, and they are so hungry, and poor Fido is so small, he hardly ever gets a nibble. There's a grand, big dog in there looks out for him when he can, and divides a bone with him, but the rough dogs get most of the food."

"Have you tried to get this Stoggs to let you have Fido back?" inquired Frank.

"Yes, but he only abused me, laughed at me, and drove me away. Yesterday he caught me trying to dig that board loose near the boulders. He kicked me, and struck me twice with his club. Wish I had a shovel. It would be safe to dig a bit now. A big balloon went over here a little while ago. I saw Stoggs in his cart driving over to the hill to get a better sight of it."

"H'm," mused Frank. "Quite an interesting situation. I'll take a look inside there, I guess. Hey, hello, why — Christmas!"

Frank, in mingled pleasure and astonishment, fairly shouted out this name. The minute he had



mounted the boulders and peered in through the crack in the fence, he made out his own missing canine among a motley group of over forty dogs.

Slam! came an instantaneous bound against the fence that made it quiver and creak. Slam — slam! right up to the spot where Frank had uttered the name, Christmas sprang repeatedly. He was mad with joy and excitement at recognizing his young master's voice.

Frank was now quite as much stirred up as his youthful companion. He had to call to Christmas to reassure and quiet the animal. The dog was tearing at the fence barred in such a frenzied manner that Frank feared he would severely injure himself.

"How did Christmas ever get this far away from home?" he reflected, getting off the boulders and onto the ground again. "Say, if that Stoggs has gone deliberately out of his territory and caught him at Greenville, I'll get the boys to come here and tar and feather him. Easy, old fellow," called Frank to Christmas, who, yelping frantically, could still be heard throwing himself against the boards of the fence.

"My goodness!" shouted Frank's companion, suddenly. "Look at that, now."

His eyes goggled as a great snap sounded out.



"The mischief!" exclaimed Frank. "This won't do."

Christmas, it seemed, had flung his body with terrific force against the very plank where the owner of Fido had been digging. Its ground end was soaked and rotted by the damp earth that had surrounded it. It gave, vibrating, and Christmas forced his head and shoulders through the aperture. He wriggled and howled, for the board closed on him like a wedge. Then, making a desperate lunge, the dog bore the board outwards. There was a sharp snap. Obliquely the timber ripped four feet up its length.

Bursting the slivered section fully apart, Christmas, with a joyous howl, sprang free. He bounded upon his master in frantic delight, with such impetuosity that he bore Frank flat to the ground.

"Here, behave, old fellow. Well, I'm glad, too," said Frank. "For mercy's sake!"

With difficulty restraining the wild caresses of his loyal dumb friend, Frank regained his feet to stare about him in consternation.

Christmas had blazed the way to freedom, and a vast concourse was following his lead. It was like bees pouring out from a bee hive. Through the break in the fence there came bounding what



seemed to be an endless procession. There were big dogs and little dogs, mastiffs, fox terriers and collies. One magnificent St. Bernard got wedged in the fence break. Those behind fairly pushed him through, letting loose a stream of canines like corn from a spout.

Out bounded the released animals, fairly crazy with delight at finding their freedom. Nearly all of them instantly made for a near ditch filled with clear water. They lapped it up luxuriously, they rolled and wallowed in the pure, cool element. Then, like diverging spokes from one central source, they streaked it homewards as instinct told them their proper compass point.

The little ragged urchin Frank found seated on the ground, fondling and crying over the tiniest, silken-haired poodle he had ever seen. Its own affectionate antics were fairly affecting. Beside the pair, limping on three legs, a forlorn little fox-terrier looked homelessly and friendlessly longing, as if begging for a share of attention.

“Yes, I’ll take you, too!” cried the ragged youngster, putting Fido under one arm and gathering up the crippled canine in the other. “Say,” he shouted to Frank, “you’re a brick! Oh, but you’ve done a good day’s work. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Only, get now — don’t



wait. If Stoggs catches us, he'll send us to jail for life. Why," continued the urchin with a start, staring hard at Christmas," is that your dog? "

"It is," nodded Frank.

The little fellow stooped and deliberately kissed Christmas, his eyes full of grateful tears, purring out found terms of endearment.

"You're two grand fellows!" he blubbered. "That's the dog that was such a good friend to Fido," and Fido, whimpering, struck out his head and rubbed noses with Christmas, who frolicked around all hands as if some great jubilee was going on.

"Yes, I fancy we had better be moving on," said Frank, with a glance into the enclosure to find it entirely deserted by its recent inmates.

"About your dog, though," said his companion, hurriedly. "I can tell you something about him."

"Can you, indeed?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir. I was here the day a man drove up in a gig from Riverton-way with your dog."

"In a gig?" repeated Frank, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, I was hanging around near the house at the front of the pound. The man called Stoggs out. He had your dog tied behind the axle. He



made a bargain with Stoggs for five dollars to get rid of the animal — send him away somewhere. He was a man with reddish side-whiskers and a cast in one eye."

Frank's own good eyes flamed. He drew his breath with an angry catch in it.

"Dorsett," he said. "The villian did it, eh? I wondered how poor Christmas came to be cooped up here, so far away from home. The mean sneak! He did it so he could snoop around the house and spy on us without interruption. Going? Good-bye. I hope you will keep Fido safe and sound from the dogcatchers this time."

"You bet I will," cried the little fellow, bolting off with his double canine burden. "And you're a brick!"

Frank turned his face in the direction of home. He soon got out of sight of the pound with no indication of his having been seen or pursued. Christmas bounded over the fresh turf, cutting up all kinds of antics and barking joyously.

When they reached the flats Frank secured his rubber boots and was soon in the midst of the morass. Christmas led the way, making grand fun of leaps and dousings, and they reached the woods beyond with no mishap.

Frank drew his bicycle from the spot where he



had hidden it, secured his rubber boots to the machine, and was speedily threading the path he had traversed in the opposite direction earlier in the day.

Passing down a gentle declivity in an open space, Christmas set up a sudden bark. Frank turned, to observe the dog halted and looking aloft.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, also glancing skywards. "That must be the balloon the little fellow at the pound was telling about."

The balloon was about two miles distant, and was instantly obscured from view by some tall trees.

Frank had kept on going without looking ahead. The momentary distraction had its result.

Too late he turned the handle bars of the bicycle and set the brake.

Bump! the machine struck a jagged tree stump, and Frank Newton took a header.



## CHAPTER V

### THE BALLOONIST'S RESCUE

THERE was a sharp bang as the bicycle struck the tree stump. Frank righted himself readily and ran to the machine where it had fallen.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "tire punctured and the wheel a pretty bad wreck generally."

This was true. A jagged sliver had ripped a hole in both the outer and inner tubes of the front wheel. The hard bang against the tree stump had twisted several spokes out of place and set a rim wobbling.

Frank had started in such a hurry from Riverton that morning that he had not thought of taking his mending kit along. He debated what he should do without further loss of time.

"I might carry it," he reflected. "If I try to run it, I will loosen it up more and lose some of the parts. Guess I'll leave it here, get my message to Mr. Buckner, stop at the house for my tool kit, and fix the machine up right here. This way, my staunch and trusty friend," he hailed to



Christmas. "Watch it, old fellow, watch it," said Frank to the dog, placing his hand on the wheel.

Christmas looked longingly after his young master as Frank started on foot for Greenville. However, the animal posed right alongside the bicycle. Frank knew that it would take a loaded cannon to drive the trusty canine from the vicinity of his charge until he himself reappeared and gave the word.

It was just one o'clock when Frank, a trifle dusty and footsore, entered the office of Mr. Buckner.

"Well, well, good for you, Frank," commended the insurance man, as he glanced at the clock and then at his visitor's beaming face. "Of course you succeeded?"

"I did," admitted Frank, a little proudly, "but there was a tangle."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Dorsett was on the spot. There is the receipt. I had to climb for it."

"What do you mean?"

Frank told of the circumstances of his exploit at Mr. Pryor's office at Riverton. Mr. Buckner lay back in his chair chuckling and laughing. Then he got up and clapped Frank approvingly on



the shoulder with one hand, and with the other extended a crisp new five-dollar bill.

"I am glad to get this," said Frank, "but I have hardly earned so much, I think."

"What! when you saved the day by your nimbleness and square common sense? See here, Frank, I'm mightily pleased with you, and if you will drop in here to-morrow I think I can put you in the way of earning a few more of those precious notes."

Frank bowed his thanks and left the office with a light heart. He went straight home, entered the house quietly, and actually startled his mother by silently dropping the five-dollar bill on the book in her lap.

Mrs. Ismond shared her son's pleasure when Frank recited his brisk experiences of the morning. He ate a good lunch with appetizing vigor, secured his bicycle repair kit, and was soon down the road, whistling cheerily all the way to the big woods.

As Frank neared the spot where he had left Christmas and the bicycle, he was greeted with loud and repeated barking.

"That's strange," he mused. "Christmas isn't given to such demonstrations when on duty. Some one must have come in sight or hearing. Hey, old fellow, what's all this rumpus?" questioned Frank,



as, emerging from a copse, he came in full view of the dog.

Christmas was running up and down in front of the bicycle. He would face in a certain direction and pose and bark. He even ran up to his master as Frank approached, and seizing his coat in his teeth gently but resolutely pulled him in the direction he had pointed.

"He means something by all this," declared Frank. "Go ahead," he ordered.

Christmas, thus advised, bounded forward among some big trees. Frank, coming up with him after a jaunt of about three hundred feet, found him squatted on his haunches under a giant oak tree, looking up among its branches. Frank looked up, too. A moving object attracted his attention.

"Why," said Frank, staring fixedly, "it's a balloon."

This he discerned beyond question. He could plainly make out its slack rigging. An ungainly, half-distended gas bag was wobbling about in the topmost branches of the tree. Lower down, turned sideways and partly smashed in, was a big wicker basket.

"It must be the balloon that little ragged fellow told about, the same one that I saw when I took





HE KEPT HIS EYE ON THE SWAYING FIGURE OVERHEAD  
ALL THE TIME.—*Page 41.*







that header from the bicycle," decided Frank. "There couldn't have been any one in it. Oh, say — but there was, Mercy!" and Frank gave a violent start and quick gasp. He stood transfixed with a sudden thrilling emotion akin to terror,

His eye sweeping the tree expanse keenly, he now made out, lying across two limbs about thirty feet from the ground, a human figure.

This form was motionless, and bent the branches considerably. As the breeze stirred them, they rocked like a cradle.

Frank guessed out the situation instantly. The balloon had driven or dropped into the tree top, shattering the cage and tipping out its pilot.

The latter had sustained a twenty-foot fall, striking some big branches with enough force to stun him. He had landed on his present frail perch. Frank's heart almost stood still as he realized that a single waking moment, a treacherous shifting of the wind, might precipitate the imperilled balloonist to the ground with a broken neck.

Frank's nerves were on a hard strain, but he grew composed as he decided what he would do. He motioned the dog to silence, and at once started to climb the tree.

He kept his eye on the swaying figure overhead



all the time. At length Frank reached a big crotched branch shooting out from the main trunk not four feet under that which sustained the unconscious balloonist.

Frank braced his feet across the crotch. He took a great, long breath of relief and satisfaction, for he found himself now so situated that if the man should stir or slip from his insecure resting place, he could retard his fall.

Frank had, upon leaving home, placed a long coil of rope in his coat pocket. This he intended to use to tie up the bicycle in case he found it necessary to take it home to repair it. He now used this to form a criss-cross sort of a hammock directly under the two branches supporting the balloonist.

"There," said Frank finally, feeling he had the man in right shape at last. "If he drops, that contrivance will hold him like a net."

The youth rested for a few minutes, for it had been no easy task to slip the rope around the two branches and secure it stoutly. When he again stood up, he moved along his footing so that his face was on a level with the strange bed of the balloonist.

The latter lay sunk down among bending twigs like a person in a hammock. His face was bloodless, and over one temple was a great lump. That



was probably where a heavy branch had struck and stunned him.

The stranger was fairly well-dressed, and he had intelligent features. For all this, however, there was a careless, easy-going look about him. He did not at all suggest to Frank the quick-witted, nerve-strained typical aeronaut.

Frank made his footing very sure, braced firmly, and with one hand took a stout grasp under the sleeper's collar.

"Wake up — wake up," he called directly in his ear.

The man stirred faintly, only. Frank continued to call out to him. He also with his other hand slapped his chest, his cheeks, his outstretched palms.

Finally with a deep groan the man opened his eyes wide suddenly. He stared and mumbled and tried to start up, but Frank held him flat.

"Easy, mister, now," warned Frank gently. "Take time to find out the fix you are in. Then let me help you to the ground."

"Help me — why, ginger! I understand," exclaimed the balloonist.

He lay back weakly, staring at Frank, then all about him, and finally up at the gas bag flopping about in the upper branches of the tree top.



"I remember now," he went on in a drawling, reminiscent tone. "It was a quick drop. Valve blew out. A regular smash when we landed. She's a wreck, isn't she? And say," and the man glancing sideways downward shuddered, "if I had gone the full header it would have been all day with me, eh?"

Frank nodded. Briefly he explained how he had come to discover the refugee's plight. He helped the man to sit up, guiding and assisting him. The latter came slowly out of his maze of bewilderment, and looked grateful.

"You've saved me, I guess," he observed. "One move or slip, and I'd have gone shooting down the rest of the way."

"When you are ready, let me help you to the ground," suggested Frank.

"Oh, I'm all right now. Just a little shaking up," assured the man. "No, no, don't you worry. I'm at home among trapezes."

The balloonist extricated himself successfully from the swaying branches and poised in a crotch nearer to the main trunk of the tree.

"Just a minute," he said, deftly going up the tree, clambering over the shattered basket and reaching up.

There was a great hiss and a dense taint of es-



caping gas in the air as he operated some valve in the mechanism of the balloon. The gas bag dropped gracefully to a mass of silken and rubber folds.

Then the man started to descend, Frank preceding him. Both reached the ground in safety. The balloonist took an approving look at Frank, patted Christmas and began arranging his disordered attire.

"What are you going to do next?" asked Frank, after his companion had walked around the tree two or three times, viewing its top speculatively the while, and whistling softly to himself.

"Well, the bag is safe for a time. I guess I'd better get to the nearest town and telegraph the boss. It will be a job getting the balloon out of that fix without further damage."

"If you will rest a bit till I fix up a broken bicycle I have over yonder, I will pilot you to Greenville," said Frank.

"Good for you," commended the man, and he followed Frank to the spot where the wheel lay.

Frank set at work on the damaged bicycle. He now had the necessary tools and material at hand to fix it up. At the end of ten minutes he had the wheel in safe shape to roll it home, where he could repair it more permanently.



Meantime his companion rattled on volubly. He told Frank his name was Park Gregson. He was a sort of a "knockaround." He had been with a circus, had fought Indians, had been major in the South African War, had circumnavigated the globe twice, in fact, a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none for over fifteen years.

"That balloon," he explained, "belongs to a professional aeronaut. He hired me to help him. She's a new one, that yonder. I was making a trial cruise. Professor Balmer, who owns her, is at Circleville. As I say, I must wire him to come and get her on her feet again."

"You mean her wings?" suggested Frank.

"Exactly. Ready? No, you needn't help me, I'm only a trifle bruised and stiff."

Frank led the way townwards. He stopped at the house to put his bicycle away. Then he accompanied his companion to the railroad depot. Here Park Gregson wrote out a telegram and handed it to the operator.

"Expect an answer," he observed. "I'll call for it. No, send it to me. I say, Newton," he addressed Frank with friendly familiarity, "where's the best place to put up till the professor reports himself?"

"There's a fairly good hotel here," said Frank.



Gregson looked a trifle embarrassed for an instant. Then he laughed, saying.

"They'll have to take me in penniless till the professor arrives."

"That will be all right," declared Frank. "I'll vouch for you. But say, if you would be our guest at home, you will be very welcome."

"And I will be very delighted to have your most entertaining company," instantly replied Gregson. "I'll make it all right when the boss comes."

Frank was glad to offer this hospitality to his new chance acquaintance. The man interested him. Everything he talked about he covered in a vivid way that made his descriptions instructive. Already he had suggested some points to Frank that had set the latter thinking in new directions. The wide experience of the man was suggestive and valuable to Frank.

Park Gregson asked the telegraph operator to send any reply to his message to the Newton home, and accompanied Frank there.

As they neared the cottage a man in a gig came driving down the road. It was Dorsett.

He glared fiercely at Frank, and then bestowed an inquisitive, suspicious look upon the stranger.

Frank introduced Gregson to his mother, who



prepared a lunch for him. Gregson was more shaken up than he had expressed, and was glad to lie down and rest in the neatly-furnished spare room of the cottage.

Frank had some odd chores to do about the village. When he came home again about six o'clock he found Gregson refreshed-looking and comfortably seated in the parlor reading a book.

They had a pleasant time at the supper table. Then they adjourned to the cozy little sitting-room. Christmas was allowed to stay in the house, and seemed to enjoy the animated ways of the balloonist as much as the others.

Park Gregson fairly fascinated them with the story of his travels and adventures in many countries.

"You see, I have been quite a rolling stone, Mrs. Ismond," he said. "A harmless one, though."

"Have you never thought of settling down to some regular occupation, sir?" suggested Frank's mother.

"It's not in me, madam, I fear," declared the knockaround. "I did try it once, for a fact. Yes, I actually went into business."

"What was the line, Mr. Gregson?" asked Frank.

"Mail order business."



Frank showed by the expression of his face that the balloonist had struck a theme of great interest to him.

"I had a partner," went on Gregson. "We advertised and sold sets of rubber finger tips to protect the hands of housewives when working about the house."

"Was it a success?" inquired Frank.

"It was great — famous. The orders just rolled in. We made money hand over fist and spent it like water. One day, though, there came a stop to it all. A lawyer served an injunction on us. It seemed that the device was a French invention patented in this country. My partner sloped with most of the funds, leaving me stranded. All the same, it's a great business — the mail order line."

For over an hour Frank kept their guest busy answering a hundred earnest questions as to all the details of the mail order business.

When Gregson had retired for the night Frank sat silent and thoughtful in the company of his mother. Finally he said.

"Mother, Mr. Gregson's talk has done me a lot of good."

"I saw you were very much interested," remarked Mrs. Ismond.



“Interested!” repeated Frank with vim, unable to control his restless spirit and getting up and pacing the room to and fro — “I am simply wild to go deeper into this mail order business. Why, it looks plain as day to me — the way to begin it — the way to exploit it — the way to make a great big success of it. He says that little metal novelties of the household kind take the best. I was just thinking: there’s a hardware novelties factory right on the spot at Pleasantville, and — Down, Christmas, down!”

The dog had interrupted Frank with a low growl. Then, before Frank could deter him, the animal flew at the open window of the sitting-room.

Frank seized Christmas by the collar, just as the animal was aiming to leap clear through it to the garden outside.

“Why, what is the matter, Christmas?” spoke Mrs. Ismond, arising to her feet in some surprise.

Just then a frightful shriek rang out from under the open window, accompanied by the frantic words:

“Help, murder, help — I’m nearly killed!”



## CHAPTER VI

### “MAIL ORDER FRANK”

AT the outcry from beyond the window of the little sitting-room, the dog, Christmas, became fairly frantic. Seizing him by the collar, however, Frank gave him a stern word. Wont to obey, the animal retreated to one side of the room, but still growling, and his fur bristling.

Frank instantly caught up the lamp from the table and carried it to the window. His mother peered out in a startled way at the scene now illuminated without.

“Why, it is Mr. Dorsett!” she exclaimed.

“As I expected,” said Frank, quietly.

“Frank,” murmured his mother, anxiously, “what have you been doing?”

“Preparing for eavesdroppers — and sneaks. Caught one first set of the trap, it seems,” responded Frank in clear, loud tones.

The captured lurker was indeed Dorsett. He was panting and infuriated. One foot was held imprisoned in a wooden spring clamp chained to a



log in a hole in the ground. This aperture had been covered with light pieces of sod which Dorsett was pushing aside with his cane, while he continued to groan with pain.

The lamplight enabled him to discern more clearly the trap that had caught him. He managed to pull one side of the contrivance loose and got his foot free.

Wincing with pain and limping, he came closer to the window, boiling with rage.

"So you did it, and boast of it, do you?" he howled at Frank.

"I did and do," answered Frank calmly. "This is our home, Mr. Dorsett, not a public highway."

Dorsett uttered a terrific snort of rage. He brandished his cane, struck out with it, and it's end went through the panes of both the upper and the raised lower sash.

Frank receded a step, unhurt, with the words:

"Very well. You will pay for that damage, I suppose you know. You will get no further rent until you repair it."

"Rent!" roared the frenzied Dorsett. "You'll never pay me rent again. I'll show you. Tenants at will, ha! Can't stroll around my own property, hey? Why, I'll — I'll crush you."



“Mr. Dorsett,” spoke up the widow in a dignified tone, “it is true this is your property, but you have no right to spy upon us. You took away our dog —”

“Who says so — who says so?” shouted the infuriated man.

“Christmas himself will say so in an unmistakable manner if I let him loose at you,” answered Frank. “The poundmaster at Riverton might be a credible witness, also.”

“You’ll pay for this, oh, but you’ll pay for this!” snarled the wretched old man as he limped away to the street.

Mrs. Ismond sank to a chair, quite pale and agitated over the disturbing incident of the moment.

“Frank,” she said in a fluttering tone, “that man alarms me. It makes me uneasy to think he is lurking about us all the time. I am unhappy to think we are subject to his caprices, where once he owned the property.”

“We own it yet, by rights,” declared Frank. “Some day I may prove it to Dorsett. But do not worry, mother. You must have guessed from my interest in what Mr. Gregson said to-night, that I believe there is something for me in this mail order idea. I have not yet formed my plans,



but I am going to get into business for myself."

The boy heard their guest stirring about upstairs, probably aroused by the window smashing. He reassured Gregson and went to bed himself.

Frank lay awake until nearly midnight thinking over all that Gregson had told him. He went mentally through every phase of the mail order idea that he knew anything about.

When Frank finally fell asleep it was to dream of starting in business for himself. At broad daylight he was in a big factory which his own endeavors had built up. Around him were his busy employes nailing up great boxes of merchandise ordered from all parts of the country.

The sound of the hammers seemed still echoing in his ears as he was aroused by the voice of his mother from her own room.

"Frank! Frank!" she called.

"Yes, mother," he answered, springing out of bed.

"Some one is knocking at the front door."

"Knocking?" repeated Frank, hurrying into his clothes. "That's no knocking, it sounds more like hammering."

Christmas was barking furiously. The hammering had ceased by the time Frank had got down



the stairs and to the front door. He unlocked it quickly.

At the end of the graveled walk, just turning into the street was old Dorsett. He waved a hammer in his hand malignantly as he noticed Frank.

"We'll see if I am to have free range of my own premises," he shouted. "Young man, you get your traps out of here within the time limit of the law, or I'll throw you into the street, bag and baggage."

Frank saw that Dorsett had just nailed a square white sheet of paper across the door panel. He stood reading it over as his mother came out onto the porch.

"Was that Mr. Dorsett, Frank?" she inquired.

"Yes, some more of his friendly work."

"What is it, Frank?"

"A five-days' notice to quit," answered Frank.

Mrs. Ismond scanned the legal document with a pale and troubled face. Frank affected unconcern and indifference.

"Don't let that worry you, mother," he said, leading her back into the house.

"But, Frank, he can put us out!"

"If we stay to let him, probably. The law he has invoked to rob us, may also enable him to evict us, mother, but he won't win in the end. You say



you dislike the place. Very well, we will move."

"But where to, Frank?"

"This isn't the only house in Greenville, is it, mother?" asked Frank, smiling reassuringly.

"What's more, Greenville isn't the only town in creation. Stop your fretting, now. I've got a grand plan, and I am sure to carry it out. Just leave everything to me. My head is just bursting with all the ideas that interesting balloonist has put into it. Why, mother, if I can only get a start, if I can get hold of a few novelties and do a little advertising —"

"Oh, Frank, it takes money to do all that!"

"And brains. Mostly brains and industry, Mr. Gregson says. Mother, now or soon, here, at Greenville or somewhere else, I am determined to give the mail order idea a trial."

"Mail order, Frank?"

"Capital! excellent!" cried Frank with enthusiasm. "Why, mother, you have suggested the very catchy name. I will use to advertise by — 'Mail Order Frank'!"



## CHAPTER VII

### STRICTLY BUSINESS

THE BALLOONIST, Park Gregson, needed rest after his strenuous experience of the previous day, so Frank did not disturb him. He and his mother had their breakfast together, then Frank started out on his usual daily round of duties.

He did his chores about the house. Then he went down to the eight o'clock train to get a bundle of daily newspapers from the city. These he delivered to his regular customers. At nine o'clock he went to the office of Mr. Beach, the lawyer.

Frank was informed by the attorney's clerk that Mr. Beach had left Greenville to see a distant client. He would not be back for two days.

"I need somebody's advice about this five-day notice of Mr. Dorsett," reflected Frank, and proceeded to visit the insurance man, Mr. Buckner.

"Good!" exclaimed the latter briskly, as Frank put in an appearance, "I was just about to send for you."



"To send for me?" repeated Frank.

"Yes, I told you that you might expect some further business commissions from me, you remember?"

"Yes, Mr. Buckner."

"Well, they have materialized. Can you give me your time unrestrictedly for a week or ten days?"

"Why — yes, I think so," answered Frank, but somewhat slowly, for he thought of their family complications.

Mr. Buckner was a keen-witted man. He read something under the surface in Frank's hesitancy.

"Something troubling you, Frank?" he suggested.

"Oh, nothing serious, Mr. Buckner. It seems we have offended Mr. Dorsett. He is our landlord. He has ordered us to leave the house we rent from him within five days."

"Hum, the old curmudgeon! His house! I wonder whose it would be if some of his clever rascality was investigated?"

"Well, I suppose we have got to go," said Frank. "He is ugly and determined."

"Oh, that difficulty can be easily solved," declared Mr. Buckner, lightly. "You know the vacant store front on Cedar street? I am agent for



that property, owner a non-resident. There are five nice, comfortable living rooms upstairs. It's only two blocks' move for you. If it suits you, make the move. You need pay no rent until you decide where you wish to locate permanently."

"You are very kind," said Frank.

"Why — never thought of it!" exclaimed Mr. Buckner, with new animation of manner and voice. "The very thing, it exactly fits!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Frank.

"Sit down, and I'll explain. You took a check yesterday to pay for some salvage at a fire at Riverton."

"Yes, sir," nodded Frank.

"I notified my client last night by telegraph of our success. He's a Lancaster man, in the hardware line. He ran up to Greenville last evening to see me. It seems that Morton, the man burned out at Riverton, was also in the hardware line. Everything he had was burned up in the fire. When they came to clear the wreck, they found all the metal stock he carried massed in among the ashes in the cellar. The insurance company had it put in big packing cases. It was all mixed up, some of the stock damaged entirely. My client, however, decided that it might net him a profit on the two hundred dollars he paid for it."



"I see," said Frank.

"What he has engaged me to do, is to go or send to Riverton and get the stuff carted over here. Then he wants the rubbish gone over, and the good stuff selected and sorted out. It seems that Morton had been neglecting his regular hardware business for some time. He invented an apple corer that wouldn't core very well. He bought a lot of little stuff, such as initial buttons, needles and the like, and was trying to get into the mail order business, when the fire came along."

"The mail order business?" said Frank in a quick breath.

"Yes. Now he's going to take his insurance money and buy an interest in some publishing business in the city. Well, you can see that a little time and care may result in picking out quite a lot of really valuable stuff from the mass, brushing it up and all that."

"Yes, indeed," murmured Frank.

"We can store the plunder in the Cedar Street building. You take charge of it, hire what help you need, and I'll divide with you what I charge my client for my services. Pretty liberal, ain't I now, Frank?" asked Mr. Buckner, with a smile. "You doing all the work, and me getting a full half of the pay."



"Yes, but you are the directing genius of the affair, you know," suggested Frank pleasantly.

"Oh, I can direct all right, if you will do the hustling," laughed the insurance man. "Settled, is it? All right. My client thinks it will take a week or ten days to sort the stuff into some kind of shape. He'll be here to inspect progress next Saturday. You make your arrangements, and draw five dollars a day."

Frank was quite stunned at the munificent offer.

"I trust you implicitly, Frank," went on his kind friend. "Here is a letter to the custodian of the property at Riverton, and here is twenty dollars to carry around with you to meet any expense that may come up. Hire the moving teams as cheaply as you can, store the boxes at the Cedar Street place. I leave the details entirely to you. When can you start in?"

"Right now," replied Frank promptly.

"All right, get into action."

Frank was proud and pleased as he hurried back home. He did not let the grass grow under his feet, but neither did he go off in a wild tangent that might disorder things. He was all business and system.

First, he reported to his mother. They decided to move at once. Then he sought out Nelson



Cady, a close chum, and commissioned him to look after his evening paper route and other odd jobs he did daily. Frank decided he could save money by hiring home talent to do the moving of the salvage stuff. He was not much acquainted at Riverton. The teamsters there might be extortionate, as it was a double trip for the wagons.

Within an hour's time Frank had made an excellent bargain, and all interested were duly satisfied with the arrangement. An honest old negro named Eben Johnson, who carted ashes and other refuse for the town, was not doing much that especial day. He agreed to lease his two teams and one driver for twelve hours for seven dollars and the keep of man and horses.

Frank knew he could make no more economical arrangement than this. By eleven o'clock he was on the way to Riverton, acting himself as driver of one of the teams.

The driver of the other team was a good-natured though rather shiftless fellow, named Boyle. When they reached Riverton, Frank took him to a restaurant, gave him the best meal he had ever eaten, and made the fellow his friend for life. The horses were given a first class feed and a good rest.

Frank found he had to handle eight immense



packing cases and one zinc box. This latter was full of books and papers. These went to the purchaser, it seemed, along with the "good will" of the business.

The eight packing cases were tremendously heavy. A glance at their contents showed Frank a confused jumble. There were hammers and hatchets with their handles burned off, saws and chisels, blackened, and some of them burned out of shape by the fire. There were nails, tacks, hinges, keys, door knobs, in fact a confusing mass of mixed hardware of every description.

Frank and his man could not handle four of the cases alone. The lad had to hire a couple of men to help them load these onto the wagons. As they got all ready to start for home, the custodian came up with a little wizened man with a Jewish cast of countenance, and introduced him as Mr. Moss.

"There's a lot of junk not worth carting away over at the ruins," explained the custodian to Frank. "This man wants to buy it."

"All right," said Frank, "let him make an offer."

"Mein frient, two dollars would be highway robbery for dot oldt stuff," asserted the junk dealer, with a characteristic shrug of his shoulders.



"Is that your offer, Mr. Moss?" asked Frank in a business-like tone.

"I vill gif it chust to spite oldt Isaacs, my competitor," declared Moss.

"Well, we will go and take a look at the stuff," said Frank.

"Mein frient, dot vos useless," insisted Moss. "Time ish monish. Tree tollars!"

"No," said Frank definitely. "I always calculate to know what I'm about."

He left the wagons, and accompanied by Moss soon reached the blackened ruins of the hardware store.

Just as they arrived there, a shrewd-faced little urchin approaching them halted, and gave both a keen look.

"Hoo!" he yelled—"I must tell vader!"

Moss threw his cane after the disappearing urchin, and looked perturbed and anxious.

"Dot vos de stuff," he explained, pointing out two cindery piles back of the ruins.

"Why," said Frank, poking in and out among the debris, "there is quite a heap of it."

"Ashes, mein frient, ashes," suavely observed the junk dealer.

"Not at all," retorted Frank. "Here is a stove, all but the top. Here are a lot of hoes and



rakes, twisted a little, but not entirely worthless. Both heaps are nearly all solid metal. There must be over a ton of iron here."

"Four tollars — I tell you vot I do: four tollars," said Moss fervently.

Frank shook his head and continued to look calculatingly at the blackened heaps.

"Five tollars," spoke Moss with sudden unction. "Mein tear younug frient — cash. Say nodings. Dere vos de monish."

But Frank looked resolutely away from the bank note tendered as a near shout rang out.

A stout, clumsy man had come lumbering around the corner at his best gait, in a frantic state of excitement.

He was in his shirt sleeves, drenched with perspiration and waving his arms wildly. Beside him ran the urchin Frank had before noticed. It was apparent that he had succeeded in satisfying his father that a sale of the fire debris was on.

"Mishter, Mishter," he called, "it is Ezekiels Isaacs. I vill puy de goods. How mooch is offered?"

"Five dollars so far," repeated Frank tranquilly.

"Six," instantly bolted out the newcomer.

"Seven!" snarled Moss.



"Ten tollars," pronounced the other, pulling out a fat pocketbook.

"Gentlemen," said Frank. "I have made up my mind. You must start your real bids at double that, or I cannot entertain an offer."

"Yesh," cried Moss eagerly—"twenty tollars."

"Und a kee-varter!" howled his rival.

"Un a hal-luf!"

"Tage it!" roared Moss, waving his cane in impotent rage, and turned away disgusted.

"Of course you gif me four per cent. discount for cash?" demanded the successful bidder.

"Of course I shall not," dissented Frank. "Shall I call back Mr. Moss? No? Thanks,—that is correct, twenty dollars and fifty cents. Here is a receipt.

Frank felt that he had closed an exceptionally good sale. Within half-an-hour the wagons were started on their way for Greenville.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A STEP FORWARD

THE return trip took three hours. It was just five o'clock when the wagons drew up in front of the store front building on Cedar Street, in Greenville.

A man whom Mr. Buckner had hired was sweeping out the place. With his aid and that of another helper, the big packing cases were stowed in the main floor room as Frank wanted them.

Frank had just paid off the two outsiders, when the man he had leased the wagons from drove up in a light vehicle. He was all smiles. He looked over the horses and turned to Frank.

"Mistah Newton, sah," he observed, "the mussiful man am kind to his beast. Ah see dem hosses in good trim, sah, and am obleeged. Sah, you am a good-luck boy. Like to hire you as my manager, sah, ef I had enough money. Ha! Ha!"

"Where does the good luck come in, Mr. Johnson?" inquired Frank smilingly.



"Ah tell you 'bout dat, sah. Logic am logic. Theyfoh, it follows ef I'd gone up to dat no-good, cheap hauling for de lumbah comp'ny I'd been out five dollahs, 'cause you paid me seben, 'sides having de hosses worked to death. Again, sah, de suckamstance am dis: I happened to be in town when a stranger gen'man came 'long and hiahed me to drive him into de woods. Got another gen'man from your house. I helped dem get a b'loon down from a tree, load it on de wagon and took it to de train. One ob de gen'mans knew you 'ticularly, sah."

"Yes, Mr. Gregson," murmured Frank. "Did both leave town?"

"Yes, sah, with the b'loon."

Frank was sorry he had not seen his entertaining acquaintance before he went away. Mr. Johnson continued:

"Rar gen'man, dose, 'specially dat professor. What think, sah? He say: 'How much am dis exertion on youah part worth, Mistah Johnsing?' and when I say, 'Bout eight bits, Mistah Professor,' he laugh and gib me a five dollah gold piece. And de other gen'man say to me confimadentially: 'Mistah Johnsing, please tell young Mistah Newton I shall write to him, and when I get making a little money I shall do myself de pleashah of send-



ing him a gold watch and chain, and dat dog of his a gold collah.' Deed he did, sah."

Frank laughed pleasantly, believing that "Mistah Johnsing" was romancing a trifle. Then he said: "I believe our contract on the teams was for twelve hours' service, Mr. Johnson?"

"Dat am correct, sah."

"If you say so, I will give them a good feed and do our moving from the house to the rooms upstairs here. Of course I will pay your man for the extra labor."

"Dat am highly satisfact'ry to me, Mistah Newton."

The two teams were driven over to the cottage and unhitched in front of it. Frank rigged up a convenient feed trough, gave the horses their oats, and invited Boyle to join him at supper.

Frank had talked over the moving question with his mother that morning. He found that she had put in a busy day. All the pictures were removed from the walls and neatly encased in newspapers. The books had been placed in boxes; everything, even to the beds, carried from upstairs.

Notwithstanding all this, Mrs. Ismond spread out an appetizing meal for the two workers.

"Mother, this really won't do," remonstrated Frank seriously.



“What won’t do, my son?” asked his mother, smiling.

“Carrying those heavy things down stairs.”

“But I did not do that — at least not all of it,” the widow hastened to say. “Your friend, Nelson Cady, happened along about three o’clock. Nothing would do but he must lend a helping hand. Then his chums found him out. They were soon in service, too.”

Just as Frank finished his supper there were cheery boyish hails outside. Nelson and five of his cohorts animatedly demanded that they become part and parcel in the fun and excitement of moving.

Soon there was a procession carrying various articles to the rooms on Cedar Street. The wagons took the heavy furniture and such like. Just at dark the last had left the cottage. Looking back, Frank saw Mr. Dorsett sneaking into his empty house from the rear.

“He doesn’t look particularly happy, now he has had his own way,” reflected Frank. “I hope mother doesn’t take the change to heart.”

His first question was along that very line, as the last chair was set in place in the new family habitation.

“Sad, Frank?” said his mother — “no, indeed!



When we were forced from the old home on the hill a year ago, I was very sorrowful. It is a positive relief now, though, to get out of the shadow of Mr. Dorsett and all belonging to him. It is nice, and home-like and cozy here, and I am sure we shall be very comfortable and happy in our new home."

Many hands had aided in bestowing the family goods just where Mrs. Ismond wanted them. There was very little tidying up to do half-an-hour after Frank had dismissed the teamster, with a dollar for his extra work.

Then he led a gay procession down the principal village street. They entered a little ice cream parlor, and Frank "treated"—one ice cream and a glass of soda water all around.

"I want to see you, Nelson, as early in the morning as I can," said Frank, as they separated for the night.

"Business?" inquired Nelson, in a serious way.

"Why, yes. Truth is, I can put some loose change in your pocket, if you care to undertake a ten-days' job I have in hand."

Nelson shook his head dubiously, with a very important air.

"Dunno," he said calculatingly. "You see, I am expecting a letter any day now."



Frank smiled to himself. Nelson had been "expecting a letter" every day for a year. Every boy in the village knew this, and occasionally guyed and jollied him about it.

Nelson's great ambition was to become a cowboy. On one occasion he had run away from home, bound for far-away Idaho. He got as far as the city, was nearly starved and half-frozen, and came home meekly the next day.

His father gave him a good, sensible talk. He tried to convince Nelson that he was too young to undertake the rough life of a cowboy. This failing, he agreed that if Nelson would get some respectable stockman in Idaho to ensure him a regular berth for a year, he would let him go west and pay his fare there.

Since then Nelson had spent nearly all the pocket money he could earn writing to people in Idaho, from the Governor down. Nobody seemed to want an inexperienced, home-bred boy to round their stock, however. Still, Nelson kept on hoping and trying.

"I'll risk your letter coming before your contract with me is finished, Nelson," said Frank kindly. "About this cowboy business, though — take my advice and that of your good, kind father: don't waste your best young years just for the sake



of novelty and adventure. No ambitious boy can afford it."

"But I have a longing for the wild ranch life," said Nelson earnestly.

"All right, then do your duty to those at home, earn a good start here, where you have friends to help you, and begin with a ranch of your own. When I have made enough money, I would like to run a ranch myself. But I want to own it. I want to make a business investment — not fun and frolic — out of it."

"All right, I'll be on hand in the morning," promised Nelson.

"I have been saving a surprise for you, Frank," said his mother, as he rejoined her about nine o'clock. "What do you think? Your friend, Mr. Gregson, insisted on leaving you twenty-five dollars."

"Oh, that won't do at all!" cried Frank instantly.

"The professor, who was with him, insisted that it must. Besides, they left all sorts of kind regards for you."

Frank's was a truly grateful heart. It had been a splendid day for him. He took up a lamp and went downstairs, whistling happily.

"There's a lot of work to do here," he said, go-



ing from box to box, flashing the light across the contents. "There must be a million needles in that packing case. Poor Morton's apple corer — there's several thousands of those. And here's a great jumble of lawn mower repair material."

Frank stood mapping out how he would handle the mass of stuff. About to leave the room, he set down the lamp and curiously inspected the zinc box that had apparently been the burned-out hardware man's safe.

It was filled with papers of various kinds: receipted bills, statements of accounts and letters. Many of these latter were from mail customers who had bought the apple corer and were dissatisfied with its operation.

Many of the papers were partly burned away. All were grimed with smoke. Finally from the very bottom of the box Frank fished up a square package. Opening this, he found it to be some part of a mail order office equipment.

Frank's eye sparkled. There were several sheets of cardboard. On each of them a colored map of a State of the Union was printed. Each town had a hole near it. This was to hold minute wooden pegs of different hues, each color designating "written to," or "first customer," or "agent," and the like.



At a glance Frank took in the value and utility of this outfit. As he drew some typewritten sheets from a big manilla envelope, he grew positively excited at the grand discovery he had made.

“Fifty thousand names!” exclaimed Frank — “possible mail order customers all over the country! Oh, if this outfit were only mine! Can I get it, or its duplicate? Why,” he said, in a fervent, deep-drawn breath, “circumstances seem absolutely pushing me into the mail order business!”



## CHAPTER IX

### SENSE AND SYSTEM

FRANK was up and stirring before six o'clock the next morning. He felt like a person beginning life brand-new again.

When his mother appeared half-an-hour later, she found everything tidied up, including Frank himself, who hurried through a good, hearty breakfast with an important business engagement in view.

"You will excuse me for calling at your home instead of the office," said Frank to Mr. Buckner, a little later.

"That's all right, Frank," declared the insurance man, shaking hands heartily with his early caller. "Time is money, and of course you want to utilize it to the best advantage. Well, what's the news?"

Frank recited the progress of the day previous. When he came to tell of the sale of the old junk at Riverton, his host laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.



"You'll do, Frank," he observed with enthusiasm — "decidedly, you'll do! You got the moving done at just half what I expected to pay, and collected twenty dollars and a half we never knew a word about."

"Then you want me to go on getting the burned stuff in order, do you?" inquired Frank.

"Certainly — that was all understood, wasn't it? I'll try and drop around to-day or to-morrow and take a look at the plunder, just out of curiosity. As to getting it in shape for my client's inspection, I leave that in your able charge exclusively."

"Thank you," said Frank.

Nelson Cady was piping a cheery whistle in front of the store when Frank got home.

"Got no letter yet," he announced in his old important way, "so I reckon I can give you a lift, Frank."

"Good for you," commended Frank. "You know how to work all right when you want to, Nelson."

Frank unlocked the store door with a proud sense of proprietorship. Both entered the long, rambling room.

"Now then, Nelson," said Frank, "I offer you ten cents an hour, and make you superintendent of the little plant here."



“What am I expected to superintend?” asked Nelson.

“Did you notify any of the boys?”

“Oh, yes — I could get an army of them, if needed.”

“I think about half-a-dozen will answer,” said Frank.

“They’ll be here shortly all right,” responded Nelson. “It’s vacation, and — there’s the first arrival now.”

A curly-pated, eager-faced little urchin popped in through the open doorway.

“Hey, Nelse, am I early enough?” he asked anxiously.

“Five cents an hour,” announced Frank, with a welcoming smile.

“Oh, my!” cried the little fellow — “five times twenty-four is, let me see — a naught and two to carry, a dollar and twenty cents. Whoop!”

“Here, here, you don’t suppose we’re going to work all day and all night, too, do you?” said Nelson. “Eight hours will tire you out soon enough.”

“Forty cents a day, then,” cried the little fellow. “Say, I’ll be rich!”

Within the next ten minutes as many as a dozen



other boys arrived. The news of Frank Newton having work to be done, had spread like wildfire among juvenile Greenville. All hands begged for employment, but Frank could not hire all of them. He engaged first boys whose families needed help, and promised the others they should work as substitutes when any of the original employes dropped out of the ranks.

"Now then, friends," said Frank, as soon as the hiring business was disposed of, "Nelson Cady will direct what you are to do. You had better all of you go home first and put on the oldest duds you can find, for this is going to be dirty work. Look here, Nelson."

Frank had got a big piece of chalk at a carpenter's shop on his way home from the interview with Mr. Buckner.

With this he now divided the floor space of one whole side of the store into sections about six feet square.

"You see, Nelson," he said to his superintendent, "first you tip over one of those big packing cases onto the floor."

"All right, Frank."

"Then begin picking out an article at a time. Suppose it is a hammer comes first: write with



chalk on the edge of a section 'Hammers,' and then group all the hammers you find by themselves."

"I understand," nodded Nelson.

"Label all the squares plainly. Mass everything of its class in distinct heaps. That is the first start in your work."

Frank had some of his regular village chores to do. He was gone over an hour attending to various duties.

As he came back to the store again, Frank was spurred up by the busy hum of industry. Half-a-dozen urchins peering enviously in at the open front door made way for him. He gave them a kind word and stepped inside to take a sweeping view of his juvenile working force.

A great rattlety-bang was going on as the boys pulled over the heap of debris. Hands and faces were grimed. There were some blistered fingers, but the boys were working like bees in a hive.

The chalked-off sections had begun to grow in number. One was labelled "Needles." Frank stared in some wonder. There were papers of needles whole, and others with half their original paper coverings burned away, of loose needles, some rusted and blackened, some still bright and



shining; there seemed to be thousands upon thousands.

Then there was a lot of pieces of lawn mowers, blades, wheels, screws, cogs and axles. Hinges of all sizes and qualities showed up prominently. Pocket knives, scissors and carpenter tools were likewise greatly in evidence.

One pile was growing rapidly with the minutes. This was a heap of apple corers. It was a contrivance with a small wooden knob. A screw held a tapering piece of thin metal, which penetrated the centre of an apple. Then a twist was supposed to cut out the core.

From letters in the zinc box which Frank had read, he knew that purchasers of this device had complained about it greatly. In the first place it was arbitrarily set for one uniform cut. No matter whether the apple to be operated on was large or small, the hole made was exactly the same. If the fruit was hard and crisp, according to the letters of complaint the corer split the apple. If it was soft, the corer mushed the apple. There were already sorted out several hundreds of these corers. Frank wished he could get hold of them and improve them.

Frank looked over all the selected stuff in view.



Then he went in turn to the village blacksmith, the local hardware store and to a druggist friend. He returned with some sponges, soft rags, sandpaper and a can of oil. He chalked off new spaces at the rear end of the store, three being devoted to each article labelled. Then he ordered his helpers to grade the various utensils dug out of the debris. Thus, hammers: those burned beyond practical use were put in heap one, second best, heap two; those that were only slightly marred were placed in heap three.

When Mr. Buckner came to the store the following day at noon the work had progressed famously. The insurance man was greatly gratified at the lay-out.

"Sense and system," he said, and told Frank he was proud of him.

Certainly Frank had proceeded on a routine that was bound to bring good results. What he called the finished product was now strongly in evidence. He had divided his working force. Five of the small boys helped him in getting all the salable stuff sorted by itself.

Mr. Buckner's client did not put in an appearance until the following Tuesday. By that time the place looked more like a real hardware store than a repairing shop.



All the best stuff was classified and neatly laid out. The hardware man from Lancaster made one sweeping inspection of the various piles of merchandise. There was quite a delighted expression on his face as he turned to Frank.

"Young man," he said, "Mr. Buckner prepared me to meet a brisk, enterprising fellow of about your size, but the way you have handled this business is a marvel."

Frank flushed with pleasure.

"Right at the start," continued his visitor, "I offer you a good, permanent position in my store at Lancaster at eight dollars a week."

"I thank you greatly," replied Frank, "but I have partly decided on some other plans with my mother."

"All right. If you change your mind, come to me. Now then, to size up this proposition in detail."

The speaker looked into and over everything. When he had gone one round he picked up an empty red cardboard box and began to cut it up into small squares.

"I seem to have made a fine investment, Buckner," he said to the insurance man. "There's over two hundred dollars in those lawn mower parts alone. The regular stuff like tools and cut-



lery are good for as much more. See here, Newton: I am going to put one of these red cardboard squares on all the lots I wish you to ship to me at Lancaster."

"Yes, sir," nodded Frank.

"Get some strong boxes and pack the stuff well, send by freight."

The hardware merchant now went from pile to pile, placing the red bits of cardboard on about two-thirds of the stuff.

"Aren't you going to take those needles?" inquired Buckner, noticing that his client had passed them by. "Why, there's fully a million of them."

"No use for them."

"And this big pile of apple corers?"

The hardware man shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said plumply. "They busted Morton. If he couldn't make them go, I can't."

"And those other heaps of second-best stuff?" inquired Frank. "I should think they would sell for something."

"And spoil the sale of good-profit goods. No, no. That's poor business policy. I shall make double good as it is. Just dump the balance into some junk shop. Whatever you get for it you can keep, Newton."

"Oh, sir," interrupted Frank quickly, "you



hardly estimate the real value there. Why, anyone taking the trouble to put those needles up into packages could clean up a good many dollars. There's a lot of sewing machine needles there, too. They are worth three for five cents anywhere."

"All right," retorted his employer with an expansive smile. "You do it, Newton, I won't. Take the stuff with my compliments, and thank you in the bargain for all the pains you have gone to in turning me out a first-class job."

"Takes your breath away, does it, Frank?" said Buckner, with a friendly nudge. "It will give you some interesting dabbling to do for quite a time to come, eh?"

"Yes, indeed," murmured Frank, his eyes shining bright with pleasure. He was fairly overcome at the unexpected donation. He seized the hardware man's hand and shook it fervently. "Sir," he said gratefully, "I feel that you have given me my start in life."

"Have I?" laughed his employer lightly. "Glad. Well, the matter's settled," he continued, consulting his watch—"I must catch my train."

"One little matter, please," said Frank, advancing to the zinc box and throwing back its cover.

He rapidly described what it contained, includ-



ing the lists of names and the mail order routing cards.

The hardware man listened in a bored, impatient way.

"Don't want any of the truck," he said. "Burn it up, do what you want with it. Get that freight on to me quick as you can, Newton. Buckner here will settle your bill for services. Good-bye."

Frank Newton stood like one in a dream after his visitors had departed.

A great wave of hope, ambition, the grandest anticipations filled his mind.

"Mine!" he said, passing slowly from heap to heap consigned to him as a free gift. "Mine," he repeated, his hand resting on the zinc box. "At least fifty dollars in cash out of the work I have done, and the basis of a regular business in what that man has given me. Oh, what a royal start!"



## CHAPTER X

### A VISIT TO THE CITY

"It almost frightens me!" said Frank Newton's mother.

The speaker looked quite serious, as she sat facing her son, who had just read over to her the contents of several closely-written sheets of paper.

"It needn't, mother," answered Frank with a bright, reassuring smile. "Mr. Buckner gave me my motto when I started in at this work. It was 'Sense and System.' They seem to win."

"Yes, Frank, and I am very proud and happy to see you so much in earnest, and so successful."

"I have over one hundred dollars in hand," proceeded Frank. "We shall get fully as much more from the sale of our assorted needle packages and the general junk stuff down stairs. Mother, I call that pretty fine luck for three weeks' work."

"You have certainly been very fortunate," murmured Mrs. Ismond.

"Then if it is a streak of fortune solely," said Frank, "I propose to make it the basis of my



bigger experiment. Yes, mother, I have fully decided I shall get into the mail order business right away. The first step in that direction is to see Mr. Morton, the Riverton hardware merchant who was burned out. He has gone into some book concern in the city. I shall go there on the night train, see him, and then I will know definitely where I stand."

"Is it necessary to see him?" asked Frank's mother. "Mr. Buckner says that everything he left at the fire was sold as salvage. The Lancaster man made you a present of that old zinc box. I don't see, having abandoned it, how Mr. Morton has any further claim on it."

"That is because you have not thought over the matter as much as I have," observed Frank. "Perhaps Mr. Morton doesn't know that the papers in the zinc box were nearly all saved. No, mother, I intend to start my business career on clean, clear lines. I feel it my duty to apprise Mr. Morton of the true condition of things. If I lose by it, all right. I have acted according to the dictates of my conscience."

Mrs. Ismond glanced fondly and fervently at Frank. Her approbation of his sentiments showed in her glistening eyes.

A week had passed by since the Lancaster man



had settled up with Frank. It had been a busy, bustling week for the embryo young mail order merchant and his assistants.

Frank had got his employees to sort out the myriad of needles into lots of twenty-four. He bought some little pay envelopes, and had printed on these: "Frank's Mail Order House. Two Dozen Assorted Needles."

As said before, this was vacation time. There was scarcely a boy in Greenville who did not take a turn at selling the needle packages, which Frank wholesaled at six cents each.

Most of the boys sold a few packages at home and to immediate neighbors, and then quit work. Others, however, made a regular business of it. Nelson Cady took in two partners, borrowed a light gig, and to date had met with signal success in covering other towns in the county.

"Why," he had declared enthusiastically to Frank only that evening, when he handed over the cash for two hundred new packages of the needles, which Mrs. Ismond was kept busy putting up, "if the needles hold out, I could extend and extend my travelling trips and work my way clear to Idaho."

"You are certainly making more than expenses," said Frank encouragingly.



“Yes, but you see”—with his usual seriousness explained Nelson, “that letter may come any day, and I want to be on hand to get it.”

“Of course,” nodded Frank gravely, but he felt that poor Nelson’s hopes were like those of the man whose ship never came in.

While his young assistants were thus earning good pocket money and Frank was accumulating more and more capital daily, he kept up a powerful thinking.

A limitless field of endeavor seemed spread out before him. The handling of the salvage stock had been a positive education to him.

“I see where the Riverton hardware man failed,” Frank said to himself many times, “and I think I know how I can succeed.”

Frank packed up the contents of the zinc box in a satchel with a couple of clean collars, cuffs and handkerchiefs, and consulted a railway timetable.

“If I take the train that goes through Greenville at three o’clock in the morning, mother,” he said, “I arrive at the city at exactly ten o’clock. Just the hour for business.”

“Well, then, after supper you lay down and sleep till two o’clock. I will busy myself putting up some more of the needles,” suggested Mrs.



Ismond. "I will have a little early morning lunch ready for you, and you can start off rested."

"Thank you," said Frank warmly. "It's worth working for such a mother as you."

Frank reached the deserted railway depot of Greenville in time for the train. Nearly everybody was dozing in the car he entered. He had a seat to himself, and plenty of time and opportunity for reflection.

Frank consulted the sheets of writing he had read to his mother the evening previous. They contained his business plans. He had figured out what two hundred dollars would do towards starting a modest mail order business. However, so much depended on the result of his interview with Mr. Morton in the city, that Frank awaited that event with a good deal of anxiety.

When the train neared the terminus Frank took a good wash, put on a clean collar, and tidied up generally. Leaving the train he bought a satisfactory meal at a restaurant, and was ready for business.

Frank soon located the book concern in which Mr. Morton had invested his money. It occupied four gaudy offices, one of which was occupied exclusively by Mr. Morton. Frank had to wait his turn for an interview. While seated in the ante-



room, he learned something of the business going on from the conversation of some callers there.

It appeared that the concern sold book outfits to canvassers on a conditional salary guarantee. From what Frank gleaned very few ever made good, so the chief revenue of the company came from the original outfit sale.

Finally Frank was called into Mr. Morton's office. The latter looked him over with an urbane smile.

"Came in response to our advertisement for agents, I suppose?" he inquired.

"Not at all," replied Frank. "It is solely on personal business. I came to see you, sir — about your old business at Riverton."

Mr. Morton shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as though the reminder was unpleasant.

"Bills?" he growled out. "Thought I'd settled everything — sick of the whole business, and threw it up in the air for good. Go on."

"Why," said Frank, "I sort of represent the people who bought the salvage from the fire insurance folks."

"I have nothing to do with that."

"Among the debris there was a zinc box with some of your papers in it."



"Yes, I remember," nodded Mr. Morton.  
"Nearly all burned up, weren't they?"

"No, sir. In looking them over I found some of your old customers' accounts, and that like. I thought they might be valuable to you, so I came down from Greenville where I live to bring them to you."

"You did?" exclaimed Mr. Morton with a stare, partly suspicious, partly surprised. "That's queer."

Frank said no more. He opened the suit case and removed its two neatly put up packages. One contained the private papers of Mr. Morton. The other contained the mailing lists and mail order system layout.

Frank placed the two parcels on the desk before his host. The latter chanced to open the larger package first. He carelessly ran over the lists and the accompanying literature.

"H'm," he said rather irritably, "I've little use for that monument of my fool-killer experiment!"

Frank was relieved—in fact, pleased, to observe Mr. Morton contemptuously sweep aside the litter before him and inspect the second package.

This interested him. He sorted out quite a lot of bills and receipts.



"Guess I'm a careless business man," he spoke at last. "That fire so discouraged me I just got out, bag and baggage. There's some good, collectible bills here. Now then, young man," he continued, facing squarely about on Frank, "don't tell me you came way down here from Greenville with that stuff just out of courtesy and kindness."

"I will tell you the whole story, if you have the time to listen to it," replied Frank.

"Certainly — fire away."

Frank recited his experience with the salvage from start to finish. He wound up with the words: "You can see, sir, very plainly that I have hopes of getting those lists. I have a little money, and I will be glad to buy them."

Mr. Morton studied Frank in a pleased, interested way.

"Young man," he said, "you have acted very honorably in coming to me the way you have. As to that mail order literature, cart it away. I don't want it. I might sell the lists, if I had the time — I haven't — so they are yours. And, look here, these bills — I'll give you half of what you collect on them."

"You will?" exclaimed Frank, doubly delighted. "I will gladly meet the trial for ten per cent."



“No,” insisted Mr. Morton, “there’s some expense and trouble, you not living in Riverton, You’ll have to hire a rig to visit some of my former debtors. I’ve stated the proposition. Here, I’ll write you out an authority to act as my agent.”

Frank arose to leave the office half-an-hour later a satisfied and grateful boy. Mr. Morton had quizzed him considerably as to his future plans. He was down on the mail order business, for he had made a failure of it himself, but he said a good many enlightening things that at least warned Frank of the pitfalls in his business course.

“Please, one more word, Mr. Morton,” said Frank, taking up his repacked suit case — “about those apple corers of yours?”

“Whew!” cried his host with a wry grimace, “have I got to think of that grand flare-up again?”

“There’s a lot of them, you know, among the salvage?” suggested Frank.

“Yes, and there would have been a lot more if the fire hadn’t stopped returns,” declared Mr. Morton. “That was a bad investment.”

“Did you patent the apple corer Mr. Morton?” asked Frank.

“No — yes — my attorney filed the caveat, I believe. I don’t think we ever completed the pat-



ent transaction, and of course I shan't throw away any more good money on it."

"I was thinking," said Frank, "that with a little modification — improvement, you know? maybe it might be made to work satisfactorily."

Mr. Morton made such an excited jump straight towards his young visitor that Frank was rather startled.

"Young man," he said, very solemnly, "if you want me to lose all the really profound admiration I feel towards you for the business-like way in which you have managed things, don't, for mercy's sake, tell me that you have been bitten, too, with the fatal, crazy, irrational dream that you want to invent something!"

"Why," said Frank, with a smile, "is it as bad as that?"

"Worse!" declared Mr. Morton, with a comical groan. "Get the patent bee in your bonnet, and you're lost, doomed!" in a mock-hollow tone observed Mr. Morton, shaking Frank by the arm. "Drop it, drop it, or you're on the rocks."

"Then," suggested Frank, "you won't mind if I experiment with the corer?"

"Mind? I wish you'd sink it. I wish I could forget the money I lost in it. It's yours, though, if you want it, only never mention that an old



dreamer of my name ever got dazzled with a toy like that. Stick to the straight business line, lad — mail order, if you must, but cut off the frills. Don't wreck your ship on gewgaws that are a delusion and a snare."

Frank left the office of the book concern in a happy, hopeful mood. Everything had come out beyond his fondest anticipations. He was glad he had been truthful and honest in the broadest sense of the word.

He went back to the railroad depot and left his suit case in the check room. A return train for Greenville left at two o'clock, but Frank wanted to see the city. Outside of that, he wished to visit one or two large mail order houses.

Frank employed six hours to grand advantage. He came to the depot feeling that the money he had spent was a good investment.

After a light lunch he sat down on a bench in the waiting room. He counted over the little pile of bank notes in his pocketbook with a pleased smile.

"Just think," he reflected, "I expected to pay Mr. Morton twenty, maybe thirty dollars for those lists and the routing outfit, and here I am going back home with practically all my original capital. Then, too, the collection of those bills at River-



ton: why, it just seems as if fortune has picked me out as a special favorite."

Frank found the train he was to take would not leave for over an hour. It was already made up and standing on its track, but still locked up and unlighted. Frank went outside and strolled up and down the dark platform alongside the train.

He was full of pleasing, engrossing thoughts, and did not notice a large, shrewd-eyed man who had followed him from the waiting room.

Frank was just returning to promenade back from the front end of the train, when a sharp rustle made him turn half around.

Instantly a pair of brawny arms were stretched out towards him. Both of his hands were imprisoned in the grasp of a sprawling fist.

"Hey, keep quiet, or I'll smash you," spoke a harsh voice. "Now then, young man, I want that money you've got in your pocket."



## CHAPTER XI

### A FRIEND IN NEED

"HANDS OFF!" cried Frank.

His assailant laughed coarsely. He had Frank firmly in his grasp. Pushing him against the steps of one of the coaches, still gripping his two wrists in one hand he bent him back flat.

No one was in sight down the long, poorly-illuminated passenger platform. Frank at once guessed that the fellow had seen him counting over his money in the waiting room and had followed him to this spot.

Frank twisted his lower limbs to one side. His assailant was trying with his free hand to reach the pocket in which he had seen Frank place his little cash capital. Frank's movement disconcerted the would-be thief. He grew angry as his captive wriggled onto one side, holding his pocket pinned up against the car step.

"Hi, you, turn over," growled the fellow.

He gave Frank a jerk and then slapped him hard against the side of the head. He managed



to thrust his hand into his pocket containing the money.

“Ouch!” he yelled, just as his eager fingers touched the roll of bank notes. “Zounds! who did that?”

“Whack — Frank caught this sound, preceded by the air-cutting whistle of some swiftly-directed object.

Whack — whack! the sound was repeated. Frank was free. His assailant had relaxed his grasp. His hands were now busy warding off mysterious blows in the face.

Frank darted to one side, his precious savings clasped by one hand. He stared in wonder.

Some one on the roof of the front passenger coach was leaning over its rounding edge. He was armed with a jointed piece of iron. This he plied whip-fashion. Twice its end had struck the robber's face, leaving two great red welts.

Then a spry, nimble form dropped from the car roof to the platform. Frank made out a boy about his own age. He was dressed wretchedly, and was thin and weak-looking, and his face was grimed, but he must have had pluck, for, running straight up to the would-be thief, he plied the weapon in his grasp like a flail.

A sharp blow made the ruffian roar with pain.



Holding a hand to his eye, he retreated down the platform, fairly beaten off.

"There's a police officer," said Frank suddenly, noticing a man wearing a uniform come running down the platform from the direction of the waiting room.

"Oh, pshaw!" ejaculated his rescuer, springing nimbly to the platform of the nearest coach.

"Hold on, hold on," cried Frank — "I want to thank you, I —"

But his mysterious friend had sprung across the car platform in a jiffy. He was swallowed up in the darkness beyond.

"What's up?" hailed the policeman, running up breathlessly.

"A man tried to rob me," explained Frank.

"Thought I made out a struggle. Did he get anything?"

"No."

"Where did he go?"

Frank pointed towards the fan-shaped network of tracks melting into the gloom of the switchyards.

The policeman ran in that direction. Frank did not accompany him. He did not believe the officer would catch the thief. Besides, Frank was more interested in the strange young fellow who



had done him such good service in his time of need.

Frank stepped up on the coach platform and peered up and down the sidings near by. His rescuer was nowhere in sight. Frank was sorry for this. The boy had struck him as a hard-luck object. His manifest reluctance against being seen by the officer suggested something sinister about him.

Frank stood waiting for the return of the policeman, a vivid picture of his rescuer in his mind. The boy had worn a cap pulled far down over his eyes. He seemed young, yet Frank recalled that he wore a moustache.

"I'd like to give him something for saving me the loss of all that money," said Frank. "The poor fellow looked as if he needed it. Any trace of the man, sir?"

"No," answered the policeman, coming back from a fruitless search. "Better keep nearer the lights, young fellow. All kinds of rough characters hang around here, on the lookout for somebody to rob."

Frank walked with the policeman to the depot rotunda. He stayed outside, however. Once or twice he walked the whole breadth of the rotunda, peering down the passenger tracks and wishing he could find the boy who had beaten off the thief.



"There is some one now," suddenly exclaimed Frank to himself.

He made a dash down a lonely platform and ran across a couple of tracks.

"Yes, it's him," declared Frank. "Hey, just a minute. Why, what are you running away from me for?"

The person Frank was after had started up quickly at the first hail. Frank overtook him, cornering him where some milk cars blocked the way south.

The strange boy braced back against the side of a car, pulled his cap down further over his eyes, and said.

"Want me?"

"Sure, I want you," cried Frank spiritedly. "First, to shake hands with you and thank you for your bravery in my behalf."

"Oh, that wasn't anything," observed the strange boy.

"No, only the saving of all the money I've got in the world," retorted Frank.

He shook the boy's hand warmly. The latter at last slightly returned the hand pressure, but kept looking about him furtively and uneasily.

"By the way," said Frank, "what was that you hit that man with?"



"A loose-jointed ventilator slide bar I found on top of the coach."

"And, if I may ask, what was you ever doing perched up there?"

"Well, if you must know, I was waiting for the train to start out. In fact," confessed the speaker in a low, constrained tone, "beating my way, stealing a ride."

"Where to?" asked Frank.

"Oh — anywhere, anywhere away from the city."

The boy said this in such a forlorn way that Frank felt there was some pathetic cause for the despair expressed.

"You ran away from the policeman, too," suggested Frank.

"Yes, he wouldn't have much use for my kind," observed the boy.

Frank was silent for a moment, intensely studying as far as the dim light would allow the figure and face of his companion.

"What's your name?" he asked suddenly.

"My name — oh," sort of stammered the boy, "why, it's Markham."

"Well, Markham," said Frank very kindly, placing a gentle hand on the lad's arm, "you and I should be good friends. Don't edge away from



me. You say you were trying to get out of the city. Had you no idea of where you were bound for?"

"Nowhere, but the country. Some place where I'd be safe — I mean where they couldn't find — that is, oh, just to get to some quiet little country town where I could get work."

"I've got the town and I'll guarantee the work," cried Frank heartily, slapping Markham on the shoulder. "See here, no secrets between friends now. You've got no money, or you wouldn't be riding on car tops."

"That's true enough," admitted the boy, forcing a laugh.

"And maybe you're hungry."

There was no reply to this, but Markham's eager eyes strayed in the direction of the lighted waiting room and its gleaming coffee tank and polished lunch counter.

"Come on," urged Frank, keeping up a cheery, good-fellow air. "I'm ready for a bite, too."

Markham held back as Frank tried to pull him along with him.

"See here —"

"Newton — Frank Newton, that's me."

"Well, I can't go with you. In the first place, I'm a sight for respectable people. In the next



place," went on Markham, "there's some people I don't want to risk meeting."

Frank reflected for a moment or two.

"Will you stay here for five minutes till I come back?" he asked.

"Why, yes, if you want me to," was the reply.

"All right. Be sure, now."

Frank was gone less than the five minutes. He returned with a little tin pail holding a pint of hot coffee, a picnic plate containing two sandwiches, a piece of pie and some doughnuts.

"There, try that," he said, placing the things on a bumper post.

"Say," choked up Markham — but Frank strode away, whistling to himself. He did not approach Markham until every vestige of the lunch had disappeared.

"That's the first square meal I've had for two days," said Markham in a grateful, contented tone. "Say, you're good."

"Am I?" smiled Frank. "I'm good for your railroad fare to where I live, and a job right on top of it for you, if you say so."

"Do you honestly mean that?" asked Markham, almost solemnly, his voice quite tremulous.

"Every word of it," declared Frank. "I live at Greenville. It's about a hundred and fifty miles



down state. Say the word, Markham. I can see you're in trouble or distress of some kind. I'm not prying to find out what it is. I only want to show what I think of you for saving my money, and maybe my life with a courage that has got to belong to a first-class fellow."

Markham bowed his head as if in deep thought. Frank saw a tear fall to the platform. Finally his companion spoke again.

"If you will advance my fare," he said, "I'll pay you back first money I earn."

"That's a bargain," said Frank. "Come on. We'll buy your ticket right now."

"No," demurred Markham, holding back in a timorous way. "You get both tickets. I'll be somewhere on the train. I'd rather sort of hang around the smoker and the platforms till we get beyond the city limits."

"All right," said Frank.

He had a vague idea in his mind that Markham was afraid to show himself publicly in the city, for some reason or other. Frank even speculated as to the possibility of Markham being disguised. He looked, acted and talked like a boy about his own age. The moustache, however, suggested that he was a young man of about twenty.

Frank made his new acquaintance promise posi-



tively he would be on the train. He went back to the depot and bought another ticket to Greenville. He was somewhat anxious and impatient until the train started up.

There was a first stop at the limits of the city. Just as the train steamed ahead again, some one entered at the rear door of the coach.

"Hello — good," exclaimed Frank, as Markham quietly sat down in the seat beside him. "Why —"

Frank paused there, staring at his fellow-passenger. Markham had washed the grime from his face. He no longer wore the cap pulled down over his eyes. Looking bright as a dollar, he smiled, pleasantly.

"Pretty grimy, wasn't I?" he laughed.

"Why, yes," stammered the puzzled Frank, "but say — what has become of your moustache?"



## CHAPTER XII

### A BOY WITH A MYSTERY

THE boy who called himself Markham flushed scarlet at Frank's sudden words. His hand went with a quick, nervous movement to his upper lip. He looked dreadfully embarrassed.

"Never mind," said Frank abruptly, trying to make it easy for the young fellow." You look better without it."

Markham had gained time now to cover his confusion. He swallowed a lump in his throat and smiled feebly.

"You see," he stammered somewhat, "that wasn't a real moustache — that one I've dropped."

"Oh, wasn't it?" said Frank.

"No. How I happened to have it was this," explained Markham, rather lamely, but with apparent truth. "See?" and he produced from a pocket two false moustaches and as many small goatees. "Fact is, I wanted to earn some money. I saw a peddler selling those things on a street corner. They went like hot cakes. I asked him



where he bought them. He told me, said he had taken them up only temporarily to make a little pocket money. He was nearly sold out, and offered me about a dozen of them for a quarter. I sold nearly all of them, and then went to the address he gave me to stock up again. They wouldn't sell under a gross — three dollars and sixty cents, I think the price was. I didn't have that much, so my scheme fell down."

Markham now took a printed circular from his pocket, as if to verify his statement. Frank glanced over it with increasing interest. It advertised a city firm supplying street peddlers with all kinds of goods.

"Yes," said Frank, "I noticed a man selling these same articles on a street corner. It's a pretty catchy novelty with boys and young men."

"It is, for a fact," declared Markham. "Look here: did you ever see 'Teddy's Teeth?' That's an old novelty — look."

Markham produced and put in his mouth a row of false teeth, welshed the reverse side of a moustache, placed it on his upper lip, a minute black dab of hair on his chin, and turned for inspection to Frank.

The latter laughed heartily. The transforma-



tion from Markham's natural face was immense.

"You have no idea how those things catch people the first time they see them," said Markham. "I've noticed that fellows from the country buy best. Say, if I had a gross of them, I bet I could sell them in two days, down your way."

"I think you could, too, Markham," replied Frank, "and you have set me thinking on an entirely new business proposition. Can I keep this circular?"

"Surely, if it's any use to you."

"It may be," said Frank, "in fact, I think I shall order a gross as soon as I get home, just to experiment on."

"Going peddling?" insinuated Markham.

"Why, I'll tell you," answered Frank. "Settle down comfortably, and we'll chat a little. It will do me good to talk out what's continually on my mind. More than that, I shouldn't wonder if you, with all your experience, could give me some very valuable points. The long and short of it is, I am going into the mail order business."

"Oh!" said his companion wistfully, "isn't that grand?"

Frank told his new friend all about himself, his business and his hopes and plans. The other list-



ened with great attention. When Frank had finished talking, Markham showed by his expression of face that he considered him a pretty smart business boy.

"If you can afford to hang around with me till I get my bearings," added Frank, "I'll guarantee you a comfortable home anyway, and good money if you know how to earn it."

Markham's eyes grew big with excitement. Then his face fell, as he said:

"I'd like nothing better in the world, but business men don't hire strangers without a recommendation. I can give none. I'll be square with you. My name isn't Markham at all. I can't tell you my real one until maybe a long, long time. I wore that moustache partly as a disguise."

"Well, all that is your business, Markham," said Frank.

"I know that, but it must look suspicious to you. If I told you that I am leaving the city to get away from some one who is hunting me, would you feel like trusting me much?"

Frank took his companion's hand in his own and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Markham," he said, "I am willing to put entire confidence in you. I owe you that much, surely. Your secrets are not my business, I would



like to ask one question only: You haven't run away from home, have you?"

"I have no home," answered Markham in a subdued tone.

"An orphan?" insinuated Frank, gently.

"No, my father is living. He is in the Philippines. He will be out of service next January. All I am waiting for is for him to get back to this country to right my wrongs."

"Don't worry about it, Markham," said Frank, observing deep sadness and distress shadow the bright face of his companion. "You come home with me. I've got so good a mother she will welcome you gladly."

"But I want to work," said Markham.

"Haven't I got work waiting ready for you, and lots of it, too?" demanded Frank.

"That's so, is it?" said Markham, brightening up. "My! to be away — away from the city in a quiet, beautiful town. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You are the first real friend I've found in six months, and — I can't help it."

"That's right — get rid of all your old troubles," said Frank, and he did not think the less of his new friend because he had a good, solid cry. "There's nothing but sunshine ahead for you, if I can help you any."



Frank warmed to the boy as they continued their conversation. A dark spell seemed to lift from Markham's spirit, each mile accomplished away from the great city that appeared to hold some secret, haunting dread for him.

"Greenville," announced Frank heartily at length — "and home."

The hour was late, the streets deserted, but, as they strolled away from the little railroad depot, Markham walked like a person in some rapt dream. He drew in great luxurious breaths of the flower-perfumed air. He viewed pretty moon-lit lawns and gardens as if he were looking at some fascinating picture.

"Like it, do you?" smiled Frank.

"I love the country. I always did," replied Markham. "This is just grand to me. Look here, now," he continued, "you had better let me stow myself in some friendly haystack or under some hedge till morning. Don't disturb your mother to-night about me."

"Disturb her?" said Frank. "No danger of her going to bed till I show up, if it's till morning. There we are — there's the light in the window for us, Markham."

Frank led his friend upstairs over the store. Markham lagged behind until the greetings be-



tween mother and son were over. He stepped a little timidly forward, as he heard Frank say:

"Mother, I have brought a friend home with me. This is my mother, Markham."

Mrs. Ismond received the homeless boy with a sweet, welcoming smile that won his heart entirely. She told Frank to take him into the sitting room while she herself hustled about the kitchen. Frank left Markham long enough to join his mother and tell her what he owed to his new companion.

"It's late," said Mrs. Ismond a few minutes later, "but you must eat a good meal after your long, busy day, and I positively will wake up nobody in this house until nine o'clock in the morning."

There were only two beds in the house. Frank shared his with Markham. The latter wore a happy smile on his face as he stretched himself out luxuriously.

"That supper!" he said, in a rapturous sort of a way. "This nice comfortable bed! I've got to shut my eyes for fear it will all turn out a dream."

Frank was glad to lie thinking for a spell undisturbed. His companion fell into a profound, exhausted slumber. Mrs. Ismond retired, and the house was all quiet at last.

Like a panorama all the varied events of the



preceeding twenty-four hours passed vividly through Frank's mind. He felt greatly satisfied with the outcome of his visit to the city.

Then Frank began to scan the future, his plans, his ambitions. He felt truly rich with his little money capital, the present work in hand, the mail order lists, the apple corer, and other things.

"How sick that man is of his apple corer," mused Frank. "There are over five thousand of the crude, unsatisfactory things in that big box down stairs. He had a good idea all right, but didn't know how to apply it. He gave it — to — me — be —"

There Frank drifted into a doze. It was strange, but he half-dreamed, half-thought out some wonderful transformation of the hardware man's invention, and, all of a sudden, in a lightning flash, a great, surging idea swept through his brain with tremendous force.

It lifted him out of his sleep half-dazed, he gave a jump from the bed to the floor. There he wavered, rubbing his eyes, and then irresistibly shouting out:

"Eureka — I've found it!"



## CHAPTER XIII

### A GOOD START

FRANK did not go to sleep again, he couldn't. As he lay there, it seemed to him as though every nerve in his body was wide awake and on a terrific tension.

Frank had heard of some of the great inventions of the world discovered in a dream. Had he, too, in a dream, or a half-waking doze, had the same experience.

"It came like a flash," he reflected. "It's plain as day now. The apple corer improved, remodeled, in perfect working order and a success. Oh, I simply can't lie here."

Frank wriggled and tossed restlessly. Then, when he was certain that Markham was asleep again, he slipped quietly out of bed, put on part of his clothes and glided noiselessly downstairs.

Frank softly closed the store door communicating with the hallway. He lit a lamp and went over to a counter containing the great heap of apple corers.



He selected one, got a sheet of tin and a pair of stovepipe shears, and became engrossed in cutting out and forming cones, funnels and all kinds of odd-shaped contrivances.

For fully two hours Frank was working at his task. He seemed to be supplying the crude apple corer with an inner sheath, to which he had supplied a small three-bladed device. He turned it about, altered it, worked over it, and a broad smile of satisfaction stole across his face as he progressed.

"Frank, this is not sleeping."

Frank looked up from his task, quite startled, to find his mother standing a few feet away, watching him.

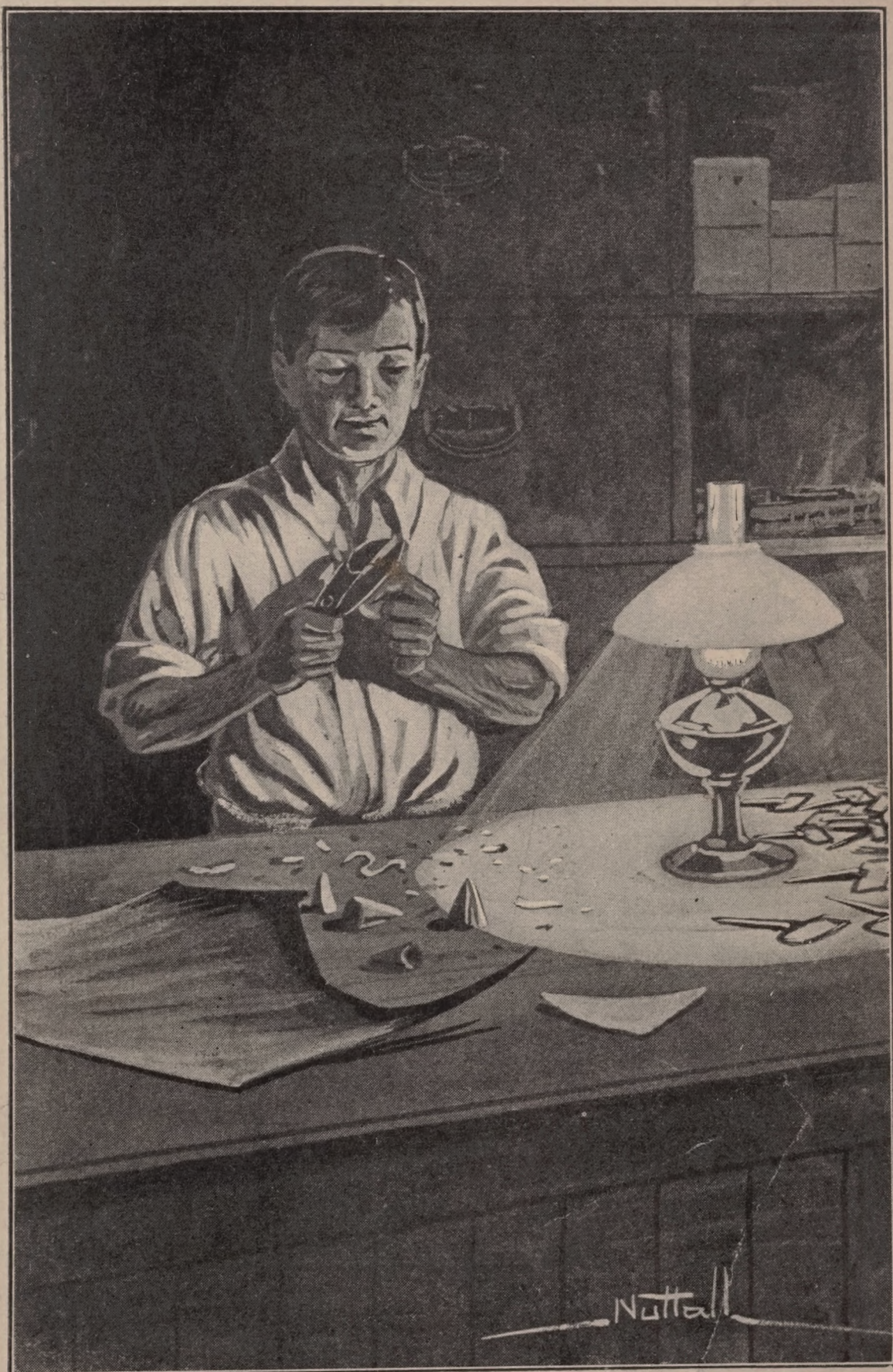
"I know it isn't, mother," he responded gaily. "It's work, good work, too, so it couldn't wait."

"But, Frank —"

"Listen, mother," he said, "I have dreamed out an invention. Really I have. If my improved apple corer works as I think it will, this is a lucky spell of wakefulness. I don't want to say much about it till I am sure of it, but I believe I have invented something practical and of value."

Frank treasured his little model in his pocket, and consented to go back to bed now. He was up bright and early. First thing he was down in





A BROAD SMILE OF SATISFACTION STOLE ACROSS HIS FACE  
AS HE PROGRESSED.—*Page 118.*







his work shop. At breakfast he was more quiet than usual. Frank was doing a great deal of thinking.

"I have certainly got the patent right bee in my bonnet," he reflected. "It's a fascinating little insect. Ah, Markham, we were going to let you sleep till you were rested up completely," added Frank, as their guest put in an appearance.

Markham was pleasant, polite and contented. He put some things in order for Mrs. Ismond, offered to help her with the dishes, and went downstairs finally to join Frank.

"Now then," he said briskly, "I'm fed up and rested up — what is there to do?"

Frank explained about the needle packages. He told Markham as well as he could what towns in the vicinity had been covered.

"There's a row of little settlements to the east," he explained. "You can use my bicycle if you like and give them a call."

"This is real life," jubilated Markham, as he set off on the wheel with a hundred packages of the needles done up in a cardboard box.

Frank received visits from several of his boy employes that morning. Then he set about disposing of some odds and ends of the salvage stock about town.



From two till five o'clock he was busy working on his "patent." From then until six o'clock he wrote several letters, went out and mailed them, and kept thinking and planning on the mail order business.

Markham, dusty and tired, wheeled up to the store about seven o'clock. He had an immense bouquet of wild flowers, which delighted Mrs. Ismond, to whom he gracefully presented it.

"What a day it has been for me," he exclaimed, after a good wash up. "Why, I seem to be free, really free for the first time in my life — the pretty roads, the lovely flowers, the sweet singing birds —"

"And the needles?" suggested practical Frank.

"Oh, I sold them before noon," said Markham, indifferently.

"All of them?"

"Fifteen packages to one little country store. Knocked a cent off my profit, but time counts, you know."

"I sent an order to the city for a gross of those false moustaches," announced Frank.

"You did?" exclaimed Markham. "That's famous! When will they be here?"

"Day after to-morrow, I think. Then I'm going down to Riverton to collect some bills. I cal-



culate it will take about three days to clean up the lot. Mother, you must run the business here while I'm gone. We will have to stay at Riverton nights."

"Shall I keep on with the needles?" asked Markham.

"Yes, but not here. We will make Riverton headquarters for this trip. You can come with me, and try the false moustaches on the community."

"Some needles, too," said Markham. "I'll guarantee to sell a gross of the moustaches in two days."

Markham did quite as well the second day as he had the first. It pleased Frank to note how he seemed emerging from a worried-looking, distressed refugee into a bright, laughing, happy boy. Mrs. Ismond had taken a great liking to him, and he seemed never tired of helping Frank with his chores clear up to bed time.

The moustaches arrived the next afternoon. They had a merry evening, Markham applying moustache, goatee and false teeth to his face, and giving character imitations thus disguised, which he had seen at some show.

Frank hired a light wagon and horse for three days, and the next morning he and Markham drove over to Riverton. They arranged for a cheap



lodging, and separated. Frank had routed the bills he had to collect systematically. The first batch took in a twenty miles circuit among farmers.

When evening came he had presented bills amounting to about two hundred dollars. As the horse walked slowly back the road to Riverton, Frank figured out the day's results.

"Pretty good," he said, running over the paper slips in a package. "I have collected forty-four dollars and eighty cents — got twenty dollars in sixty days' notes, four promises to pay, four people call again, three parties moved away, and six bills no good."

Frank drove leisurely down the principal street of Riverton, bound for the livery stable where he had arranged to put up the horse during their sojourn in town.

He halted with some curiosity and amusement at a corner where a crowd was gathered. Mounted on a dry goods box, Markham was addressing a large and jolly audience.

He was giving character sketches in a really entertaining way. After every sally of laughter he would ply his wares. Everybody seemed buying.

"He's a bright fellow and a first-class peddler," Frank reflected, as he continued on his way, unob-



served by the friend he had started in business.

"All sold out and the public hungry for more," announced Markham, as he joined Frank on agreement at a restaurant. "Those false teeth also. I'll bet fifty people asked for them. Say, it would pay to wire a quick duplicate order on the moustaches and a gross of the teeth. I can certainly sell the outfit before we leave this town."

"I'll see if I can't arrange it," said Frank, and after supper he did so. Frank got track of a purchasing agent, who for a small commission went daily from Riverton to the city, bringing back with him what light stuff he could carry in his two valises — all the baggage the railroad company would allow through free.

Just at dusk Saturday evening the two friends started cheerily homewards. Frank had made exactly thirty-eight dollars for his three days' work. Markham's profits amounted to a little over seventeen dollars.

"I want you to be my banker, Frank," he said. "Haven't I done quite well? Next week I'll cut a still wider swath."

"Not peddling, Markham," said Frank.

"Why not?" inquired Markham, in some surprise.

"Well, I'll tell you. To-night about closes up



what business I have in hand. You know all my hopes and plans tend towards starting a mail order business. We would soon exhaust this district, selling on a small scale. I want to reach a wider one. I have found out what takes with the public. Next week I am going to gather together what we have, and move to another town."

Markham's face fell. He looked a trifle uneasy.

"Nearer the city?" he asked, in quite an anxious tone.

"No, nearly a hundred and fifty miles north of here. The fact is, Markham, I am going to move to Pleasantville. I have some rare, royal friends there. Two of them, Darry and Bob Haven, are in the printing business. They own and publish a weekly newspaper. They can help me immensely. Then there is a mightier reason, too, for locating at Pleasantville."

"What's that, Frank?" asked the interested Markham.

"A man named Dawes runs a novelty factory there — makes all kinds of little hardware specialties. It is just the place to manufacture my apple corer, if it is a success. If it is not, I can advertise the list he already manufactures, and get up something else."



"There's a good deal of money in those little devices when a fellow gets up the right thing, I suppose?" asked Markham.

"Sure, anything new and handy goes great," responded Frank. "I have read of a dozen little simple inventions that have made a great fortune for the owners."

Markham was studiously silent for a few minutes. Then he asked:

"Do they make things in wire at that Pleasantville factory — I mean, do they have the material and machinery to make wire things?"

"If not, they can easily get them," answered Frank. "Why do you ask, Markham?"

"Well," said Markham, with a little conscious laugh, "the truth is, I have invented something myself."



## CHAPTER XIV

### A MEAN ENEMY

"You have invented something yourself?" repeated Frank, with a good deal of curiosity.

"Yes," nodded Markham.

"What is it?"

"A puzzle."

"What kind of a puzzle?" pressed Frank.

"I'll show it to you," said Markham, fishing in his pocket. "There it is. I don't suppose it's much," he continued in a deprecating way, "though two or three fellows who saw it said it was quite clever."

Frank inspected the article his companion now handed him with a good deal of interest. It was roughly made of wire. There was a ring linked into a triangle, and the latter linked onto two other rings. The lower one of these had a link connected with a wire square. Lying loose around this link was a larger ring of wire.

"What's the puzzle?" inquired Frank, looking over the little device.



"To get that big ring over all the other rings, the little square and the triangle."

"Oh, I see," said Frank, working at the device industriously, but finally asking: "Can it be done?"

"Readily — look here," and Markham, taking the puzzle, deftly slipped the ring over all the obstacles, and then worked it back again into its original place.

"I say, that is mighty clever," declared Frank. "Show me slower, now. The slip over the triangle is the trick, eh? Good! Markham, that thing would sell like hot cakes."

"Think so?" asked Markham, seriously.

"I certainly do. If I was started in the mail order business, I wouldn't hesitate to illustrate and advertise it in my catalogue."

"Well," said Markham, "that pleases me, for I can show in a small way my appreciation of all your kindness to me. Frank, I give it to you. If it's worth patenting, all right. I know it's original. It's yours, freely."

"On royalty — yes," answered Frank. "I'll have some nicely finished models made when we get to Pleasantville. We're getting to be great business men, aren't we, Markham, talking about



patents and royalties? How did you come to make the thing, anyhow?"

"Oh, I was for — for a long time in a place where there was lots of wire," explained Markham lamely. "I had too much leisure. It bored me. I had to find something to work at to kill time."

The old gloom that Frank did not like came into the boy's face as he spoke. Frank drifted off into generalizations on his mail order dreams to lead his mind into more pleasant channels.

There was a great confab at the supper table that evening. Frank told his mother all his plans in detail. She had too much confidence in his good judgment to oppose his wishes.

"I will be glad to get anywhere away from a place where I have seen so much sorrow," she said. "Besides that, the Haven boys and Bart Stirling and their friends are certainly good friends of yours. Has my son ever told you of the lives he saved at the great fire at the Pleasantville hotel?" Mrs. Ismond asked of Markham.

"Oh, pshaw, mother," said Frank — "don't go to lionizing me, now."

His mother was fondly persistent, however, and Markham, with gleaming eyes, was soon reading a treasured newspaper clipping telling of Frank's



heroic exploit, as already related in detail in "Two Boy Publishers."

"That's fine," he exclaimed with enthusiasm, "and I'm proud to know your son, Mrs. Ismond."

The next day Frank wrote a report to Mr. Morton about the collections. He returned the unpaid bills with notations as to the condition of each claim, explaining that he was going to move to a distant town, and naming Mr. Buckner as a reliable man to follow up the collections.

Frank saw their lawyer, Mr. Beach. The attorney stated that their suit against Dorsett would not be tried for over a year. He took Mrs. Ismond's new address, and promised to look out for her interests.

Then Frank arranged to sell off some of their furniture. It took two days to pack up the rest. Tuesday morning early all arrangements had been completed for their removal. They had engaged a freight car to carry their belongings to Pleasantville.

Frank closed up his business with Nelson Cady and the other boys. The old store building was vacated. Markham was to go with them to Pleasantville.

Mrs. Ismond was to spend the day until train



time with an old neighbor. Frank and Markham were also invited there to dinner.

They had just finished the meal. Frank was looking over a time-table and telling of a letter he had received from Darry Haven that morning, when there came a thundering knock at the front door.

"Frank," said Mrs. Ismond, in quite a startled tone, as her hostess opened the front door, "it is that man, Mr. Dorsett."

"Is the widow Ismond here?" demanded Dorsett's gruff tones.

"Mrs. Ismond is here, yes," replied her friend. "Won't you come in, sir?"

"No," sneered Dorsett, "short and sweet is my errand."

"What do you want of my mother, Mr. Dorsett?" demanded Frank, stepping to the open doorway.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" snarled Dorsett.

"Frank, do not have any words with him," spoke Mrs. Ismond, hastening to her son's side.

Dorsett stood outside. With him was a low-browed fellow whom Frank recognized as a chronic hanger-on about the village justice's place.

"I've come — with my deputy and witness, ma'am," announced Dorsett, "to inform you that



I have learned that you are about to leave town."

"Yes, that is correct," answered Mrs. Ismond.

"Very well, then here," and he produced a legal-looking slip of paper, "is a little bill you will have to settle first."

"We owe you nothing that I am aware of," said Mrs. Ismond.

"Mistake," snapped Dorsett. "When I sued on my claim to your homestead, I entered judgment against you for the costs of court. There's the amount — fifty-seven dollars."

"And not satisfied with robbing me of my home and my income, in fact everything I had in the world, you have the heartlessness to press such a claim as this at such a time?" asked Mrs. Ismond bitterly.

"Law is law," prated the mean old usurer.

"Why have you never mentioned this before?" demanded Frank, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"Because, you insolent young snip," retorted old Dorsett, "I wanted to pay you off for some of your fine airs."

"Well, Mr. Dorsett," said Mrs. Ismond, "I shall contest this unjust claim."

"All right," jeered Dorsett, retreating down the steps, and beckoning to his companion, "then within thirty minutes I'll put an embargo on your



leaving the county until I have my money, according to law."

Mrs. Ismond sunk to a chair quite pale and distressed.

"Frank," she gasped in a frightened way, "what is he going to do?"

"Some mean trick, be sure of that," said Frank. "Mother, I'll stay here ten years but I will never pay that outrageous claim."

"Be assured I would never let you," replied his mother, firmly.

"I wish I knew what he was up to?" murmured Frank in a troubled way.

"Leave that for me to find out for you," said Markham briskly, bolting from the house like a shot.



## CHAPTER XV

### A PIECE OF CHALK

FRANK NEWTON had said that Markham was a first-class peddler. If he had followed his young friend as he darted from the house, he would also have noted him quite a proficient amateur detective.

Markham looked down the street after the retreating figures of old Dorsett and his companion. He saw they were bound for the business centre of the town. He cut down an alley, and heading them off allowed them to pass him by and quietly followed on their trail.

When they went up into a building occupied as offices for a justice of the peace and lawyers, Markham in a few moments trailed after them.

Loitering about the hall, he could watch them conversing with a village magistrate at his desk. The latter consulted a copy of the statutes, expounded some point under discussion, and finally filled out several legal blanks.

Markham was industriously reading the notices



tacked to the justice's bulletin board outside of his office door, as Dorsett came out of the room.

"Hold on, Sherry," he said to his companion. "I'll settle with you now."

"All right, governor," bobbed the man.

"You are deputized to serve these papers. Don't get them mixed. Got any tacks?"

"I'll get some all right."

"Very well. When you have disposed of the first two documents, serve the last one on Mrs. Ismond, see?"

"Sure, I see, governor — ah, and glad to see this five-dollar bill. First one I've seen, in fact, for an age."

"When you're all through, report to me."

"I will, governor."

They kept together till they reached the street. Arrived there, Dorsett went one way, his hireling another.

Markham put after the latter, who was so elated over the possession of money that he chuckled and swung along the street with a great air of importance and enjoyment.

The man Sherry went straight to the railway depot. Markham, looking in through one of its windows, saw him approach the station agent. To



him Sherry read one of the documents and came out again.

The second day of Markham's residence in Greenville, he had done quite an heroic act. It had made the railroad men his friends. One of their number had celebrated pay day too freely. He had stumbled across a track.

Markham had run at the top of his speed, and had even risked life and limb to reach him in time to drag him out of the way of a freight train backing down upon him.

"Mr. Young," said Markham, running into the depot by one side door as Sherry left it by another, "you remember me?"

"Sure, I do. How are you?" said the depot master heartily.

"I'm worried to death to find out what that man who was just here is up to," said Markham, hurriedly.

"Up to? Down to, you mean," flared out Young. "He's served a paper on me as the representative of the railway company, notifying me that we are to hold the car containing Mrs. Ismond's furniture until the matter of a debt she owes old Dorsett is settled in court."

"Mrs. Ismond does not rightfully owe him a



cent," asserted Markham. "It's a mean, malicious trick of the old reprobate to persecute my friend, Frank Newton. Can they stop the car?"

The station agent shrugged his shoulders dubiously.

"They won't get any help from me," he said. "That man asked me where the car was. I told him to find out — I wasn't hunting for it. I'd like nothing better than to delay him for two hours. By five o'clock the north freights will have left the yards. Once out of the county, that furniture would be safe."

"Thank you," said Markham. "I'll see what I can do."

He ran out of the depot forthwith. Sherry had crossed the road. Markham saw him coming out of one of the taverns lining the street in that immediate vicinity.

Sherry had one or two men with him with whom he had evidently been treating. They walked along with him until they reached another haunt of the same class, and went in there.

Markham got in a doorway near the entrance to the place. In a few minutes Sherry came out to the street.

He had his hat stuck back and his head up by



this time, and was officious and blatant in his manner.

"I'd like to stay with you, boys," he announced. "Join you later. Got a big responsibility on my shoulders just now."

"That so?" smirked one of the hangers on.

"You bet. See that paper?" and Sherry produced a document.

"We see it."

"I can tie up the whole railroad system here if I want to," he bragged.

Markham hurried off in the direction of the freight tracks. There was a wide crossing where the sidings began. A flagman guarded this. Markham ran up to him. This man, as he knew, was a brother of the railroader he had saved from being run over by the freight train.

"Mr. Boyce," said Markham, "will you do me a favor?"

"Sure, will I," cried the flagman. "We're a whole family of friends to you, boy."

"All right. Have you got a piece of chalk — the kind they use for marking on the cars?"

"Dozens of it. Here's a handful, my hearty," and the flagman darted into the little shanty and out again with a fistful of great chunks of chalk.



"All right," said Markham, selecting a piece. "Now then, do you see that man coming down the track?"

"Yes," nodded the flagman.

"He will ask you about the out freights, maybe about some particular car. It's the car holding Frank Newton's furniture that he's after — their household goods they're shipping to Pleasantville."

"Aha," nodded Boyce.

"I will be in sight," went on Markham, rapidly. "Point me out to him. Say I can tell him, will you?"

"But what for — no, that's all right. I will, I will," pledged the flagman.

Markham ran down a siding. He was busy about a certain car for a few minutes. As, after interviewing the flagman, Sherry came that way, he discovered Markham seated on top of a locked box car idly kicking his heels against its side.

"Hey, hello," hailed Sherry — "this the out freights?"

"How should I know?" muttered Markham.

"Oh, I know you. You're the fellow who trains with young Newton. Of course you'd be here, and of course this is the car. Yes," decided Sherry, scanning its side. "Sure. Here's the destination marked in chalk."



Sherry read the sprawling writing: "7-23, Pleasantville," marked across the locked door of the car, and pulled out a document.

"That's the way we do it," he said in a boastful chuckle, picking up a coupling pin and using it to hammer some tacks through the paper. "There you are. In the name of the law this car seized in transit, ipse dixit, e pluribus unum, according to the statoots therein pervided. Quite a lawyer, hey? Boy, it's a life sentence to tamper with that car till the judge says move her."

"It is?" said Markham, tranquilly.

The big braggart swaggered away. Markham jumped down, watched him out of sight, jumped up and cracked his heels together. Then with his handkerchief he rubbed off the destination mark that had deluded old Dorsett's boisterous and self-important emissary.

Then Markham chuckled as he glanced at the document tacked to the car door. He now moved over to a line of made-up freights on another track. He lingered in their vicinity for over an hour.

When he had seen an engine run on a caboose and then switch to the head of the train, Markham, with a good deal of complacency in his face, started back to join his friends.

As he neared the house where he had left Mrs.



Ismond and Frank, he noticed a man leave the place. It was Sherry.

"All right," announced Markham, breaking in upon his friends a moment later. "I've found out what old Dorsett is up to."

"Yes, so have we," answered Frank, who stood by the side of his mother, who was looking down dejectedly. "They have just notified us that the car containing our furniture is attached."

"That so?" said Markham, with a broad smile. "Well, what are you going to do, Frank?"

"We can't leave Greenville, that's all," said Frank, with a sigh. "Mother, I'll go down to the station and get the money back for our tickets."

"Hold on," cried Markham, "you won't do any such thing. How soon does that train leave, Frank?"

"In half an hour."

"Well, get your traps together. You're going to take that train all right."

"Why, what are you talking about?" demanded Frank, staring at Markham in wonder.

"I mean that fellow who was just here has made a mess of it," said Markham. "He's attached a car all right, but not your car."

"What?"



"No, sir-ree! Your car, my dear Frank, I am happy to tell you, is by this time twenty miles over the county line whirling on its way to Pleasantville. Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"See here, Markham," said Frank, seriously, seizing his friend's arm in an endeavor to cure his jubilant antics. "What have you been up to."

"Me? Nothing," declared Markham, assuming the vacant bumpkin look he expressed so well when he gave a character delineation. "It's old Dorsett's emissary who was up to something — up to the wrong car, see? He has tacked that attachment notice onto a poor innocent old car filled with ballasting cinders. Never mind now. I'll tell you later. Don't miss the train, Frank."

There were hurried good-byes to their kind-hearted neighbor. Frank and Markham, each carrying two satchels, piloted Mrs. Ismond to the railroad station.

Just as the train came in from the south a man drove past the depot platform. He drew up his horse with a jerk. It was Dorsett.

He stared in amazement at the departing trio. Then suddenly, as if suspecting some trick, he got out of his gig and hurried across to the train.

Frank had got his mother to a comfortable seat. The coach window was open.



"You leave at your peril, widow Ismond," shouted Dorsett. "That stuff of yours is attached. We've stopped the freight car, and —"

"All aboard!" sang out the conductor.

"Hold on, stop — zounds!" yelled Dorsett at the top of his voice.

He was lifted from his feet suddenly. Some one rushing down the platform at cyclone speed had collided with him.

It was Nelson Cady. He was hatless, his hair flying in the wind, his whole appearance that of fearful excitement.

"Say, conductor," he panted out breathlessly. "Three people just got on the train — where are they? Must see Frank Newton!"

"Hi, there, Nelson," hailed Frank, waving his hand through the open coach window.

"Oh, jolly!" shouted Nelson, keeping on a run with the moving train. "See Frank!"

Nelson tugged at his pocket. He pulled out a white, fluttering sheet of paper.

"Frank, Frank," his excited tones rang out after the vanishing train — "I've got my letter at last!"



## CHAPTER XVI

### “FRANK’S MAIL ORDER HOUSE”

“GENTLEMEN, you embarrass me.”

“Hear! hear!”

“I may say, I am overwhelmed — overpowered —”

“Good! Get over it, and give us a speech.”

“No, a toast first. ‘Frank’s Mail Order House.’ Stet, fill up the sparking glasses once more.”

“Hip, hurrah! Success to Frank Newton and his new business venture.”

A merry friendly party was gathered about a long folding table in the middle of a spacious room. There were seven of them, and they were having a jolly good time. An acceptable lunch graced the banqueting board. Attired in a neat waiter’s apron and entering heart and soul into the enjoyment of the occasion, Stet, general utility boy for Haven Bros., helped the guests from a great pail of ice cold lemonade, and made himself generally useful about the table.



This was Pleasantville, where Frank Newton, his mother, and Markham had arrived just one week previous. The room in which Frank's friends were giving him a welcome was located on the lower floor of the old building that Haven Bros. had transformed into a print shop in their early amateur publishing career.

Long since the firm of Haven Bros. had risen to the dignity of occupying quarters right next to the *Eagle*, on the main street of the village.

They had a lease of the old quarters, however. When Frank came again upon the scene a joint committee of his loyal friends had met in executive session to see what they could do to put him on his feet.

This old structure stood back from the street, but had a pleasing lawn and flower beds on either side of the broad walk approaching it. The building was just off the principal Pleasantville thoroughfare.

There were two large rooms on the lower floor and a spacious store room above. The Havens and Bart Stirling had fitted up one of the lower rooms as an office. Bob Haven had donated a desk and several chairs. His brother Darry had put in a table and a file cabinet. Bart had furnished a neat rug. That evening they had gone to



the cottage which Mrs. Ismond had rented, and had led Frank over to this little surprise party, comprising themselves, Jim Dunlap, an old printer, and Baker Mills, also an employe of the *Herald*.

Markham was somewhat reticent at first, but he soon warmed up in response to the free and hearty spirits surrounding him.

He was immensely interested as the crowd began to chat on experiences. The story of how Bart Stirling had risen from a "sub" in a little express office to assistant manager of a large office, as already related in "The Young Express Agent," was particularly fine to his way of thinking.

The career of the Havens was quite as remarkable. They now ran the leading weekly newspaper in Pleasantville, and had a job printing business that employed two men besides themselves.

Stet, the boy they had rescued from hard usage and extortion at the hands of their rival, Jasper Mackey, publisher of the Pleasantville *Eagle*, had become a valued fixture with them.

Mrs. Haven, who furnished fashion plates for some city magazines, got up an original pen and ink sketch for the *Herald* each week. The Haven boys were generally conceded to get out the most



readable weekly newspaper in that section of the state.

"I declare," said Frank, with a grateful and a gratified look about the place, "you fellows have just about equipped me for business."

"Oh, not yet," said Bob Haven. "My sister is away for a month, and I have arranged to loan you her typewriter till you can afford to get one of your own."

"Say," broke in Markham, eagerly, "I'm just at home on that machine."

"Good for you," approved Bob. "Then there's a painter, here owes us a bill for printing he never could pay in cash. He's painting a neat gold-lettered sign for the front of your place. 'Frank's Mail Order House.' "

"Yes," put in Darry, "and I've dug out of storage an upright showcase we took for a debt. It's got twelve glass shelves. Set it up at the edge of the walk with samples of the various articles you are going to sell, and I'll warrant many farmer groups coming to town will drop in to look around and invest."

"This is simply immense," said Frank. "I'm just bursting with vanity, or self-importance, or ambition, or something of that sort."

He briefly outlined his plans to his friends.



Frank had only that day held a two hours' consultation with John Dawes, who owned the novelty works at the edge of the town.

Dawes made a specialty of manufacturing light hardware specialties. His own list embraced over two hundred articles, ranging from pocket rules to tool chests. He supplied a great many mail order people all over the country, and told Frank he would be glad to encourage a local institution.

"He has given me as low a rate as any customer he has on his books, he says," reported Frank. "Besides that, being directly on the spot, I save the freight charges, you see."

"Good," said Bart Stirling, "you've struck the right location, sure."

"Mr. Dawes is going to make my apple corer and a puzzle belonging to Markham," said Frank. "Then I have made arrangements with a dozen large city supply houses. I am going to push that harmless comical novelty, the false moustache wrinkle. I have also ordered quite a line of cheap jewelry, especially initial cuff buttons and friendship and birthday rings. I can sell at one dollar and a half a solid gold birthday ring that retailers everywhere mark at three dollars as a minimum price. Soon as I get onto all the ropes, I intend to reach out for class and fraternity emblem trade,



selling on sample, and having the goods made by a city jewelry manufacturer."

"That's it," suddenly broke in Bob Haven to Markham, who had carelessly slipped on one of the false moustaches in question. "Heard about your talent as an entertainer."

"Yes, give us a round, Markham," suggested Bart.

Markham got up on a chair, put on Stet's cap, applied goatee and false teeth, and soon had the audience screaming with hilarity over a very creatable representation of a stranded actor giving a monologue in a country grocery store.

The party broke up with congratulatory handshakes and all kind of good wishes for the success of Frank's new business enterprise.

When Bart and the others had gone, Frank and Markham looked about their business quarters with a proud air of satisfaction and comfort.

"I tell you, Frank, those fellows are royal good friends of yours," spoke Markham.

"Yes," said Frank with real emotion, "they have indeed given me the lift they promised me. We are of poor business material, indeed, if we cannot make this fine beginning lead to a grand success. Now then, for a genuine start in the morning. If you will act as typewriter till we can



afford to hire one, I will fold a batch of our first circulars.”

“Sure, I will,” said Markham readily.

Bob Haven had brought a thousand circulars just off the press. Haven Bros. were to do all the printing for the mail order business. Mrs. Haven had made several sketches, little inch squares, showing the false moustache outfit, the wire puzzle, the initial jewelry and several other minor specialties. Below followed a list of nearly fifty articles, of which Frank had a small stock on hand and could replenish on short order from city supply houses with which he had made a definite arrangement.

The two boys spread out one of the mailing lists Frank had got from the salvage stock. Four boxes containing a thousand envelopes were placed ready beside the printed circulars. Frank put out the lights and locked the office door with the care of a miser securing his treasure.

Markham routed Frank out of bed at five o’clock the next morning. They arrived at the office by six. Somewhere Markham had learned the typewriter perfectly. By four o’clock in the afternoon the thousand circulars were all folded, and the thousand envelopes all addressed and stamped.

“Why, hello, my young friends,” hailed the village postmaster cheerily, as this big mail was de-



posited on the stamp table. "If you keep this up, you'll soon have this promoted to a second-class post office."

Frank wound up the day's labor by polishing up the show case Darry Haven had sent around that afternoon. They fitted up its glass shelves with samples of the goods they advertised. They got a staunch iron standard to support the case, and screwed this securely to the walk just at the edge of the street.

"We'll work to-morrow morning on our catalogue and the advertising Darry Haven is going to place for us," said Frank, as they left for home that evening.

"Don't go in too deep at first, Frank," suggested Markham.

"No, I have formulated a definite system," declared Frank, "and I shall try to stick to it. You see, I left Greenville with about two hundred dollars. It has taken about fifty of that to get mother settled here, and incidental expenses. Then I have your twenty-five dollars you insist on leaving in trust with me. I have put fifty dollars aside for preliminary printing and some advertising in county papers Darry is going to get cheap for me. If returns are favorable I shall print a small catalogue, and put just half of our profits back into circular-



izing and advertising as fast as the money comes in.”

They had barely settled down to work the next morning when two schoolboys put in an appearance. One wanted to buy a “Twelve Tools in One” specialty as marked in the show case at twenty-five cents. The other produced a dime for a set of the false teeth.

“Profits fifteen cents and a-half to date,” cried Markham gaily, as their first customers departed. “Those little fellows will spread our fame.”

“When we get into full running order this local trade will be a nuisance to us,” declared Markham towards noon.

In fact, he was kept on the jump attending to local customers all the morning. A raw young farmer had come in to blushing buy a friendship ring. Several curious townspeople strolled to the office door, and out of good nature invested in various knicknacks displayed. One boy bought a false moustache, and within an hour twenty others visited the place clamoring for duplicates.

“About to-morrow the answers to our circulars will begin to come in,” observed Markham. “That will be the real test of the merit of this business.”



"We will close up for the afternoon," said Frank. "There's a lot of little things to do about the house and lot mother has rented. I promised she should have our help for half a day."

After dinner Frank and Markham put on some old clothes and set briskly at work. They mended the back stoop of the cottage, propped up a fence, raked the yard and got the wood shed in order.

About four o'clock both started in at the cistern at the side of the house. Its top had settled in, and new boards were required here and there, and a new trough from the house eaves.

Markham was holding a board that Frank was nailing, when some one passing by on the street whistling caused both to look up.

"Don't let go — the board will spring loose," warned Frank, turning quickly as the pressure from the board end was suddenly removed — "why, Markham —"

"Oh, the mischief!" muttered Markham.

In wonderment and consternation at a swift glance Frank noticed a strangely startled expression on his companion's face.

Then, his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the street, Markham deliberately jumped down into the cistern out of sight.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A NEST EGG

"QUICK, grap the pole!" shouted Frank.

As he spoke he thrust a long scantling down into the cistern.

"Reach for my hand — grab it. You'll be drowned," continued Frank.

"Don't bother — I'm all safe," came up Markham's hollow tones. "There's only about three feet of water here."

"How did you ever come to slip in?" asked Frank.

"Say," spoke Markham, not replying to the direct inquiry, "while I'm in here I may as well see if everything is sound and straight with the cistern."

Frank saw him flare a match. Some curious thoughts were running through Frank's mind as to the strange actions of his companion and helper.

Before he could analyze them, however, Frank saw Bob Haven turn it at the gate. He had a package under his arm. Bob stood still for a moment to gaze after the person who had just preceded him.



This latter was a young man, dressed loudly in brand new clothes, waving a slender cane with a dandified air, his whole bearing suggesting a person trying to look important and attract attention. This was the fellow the sight of whom had apparently induced Markham to plunge out of sight into the cistern.

Bob Haven stared hard after the receding figure of the stranger.

"Well, well!" he was saying as he approached Frank.

"What's the matter, Bob?" inquired Frank.

"Did you see that fellow just passed by?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"I did once — thoroughly. Heard he was in town. The nerve, now!"

"Who is he?"

"He's bad all through. Name is Dale Wacker. When Bart Stirling first took his father's place as express agent here, that fellow's uncle plotted to down him. Worse than that, he stole a lot of stuff from the express people. The police were after him. Dale, his nephew, was mixed up in it, and had to leave town. Heard he was in jail somewhere for some new exploits. Came back yesterday, I learned. Seemed to have plenty of money and tried to cut a figure showing it. Says



he's a travelling man now, and earning untold wealth. Guess he's on the way to the depot now, to find new victims to swindle where he isn't so well known as he is here. I say, who's in there, anyhow?"

As Bob spoke, Markham came climbing up the scantling out of the cistern. He was wet to the knees and looked troubled of face.

Frank noticed that he glanced anxiously in the direction of the street.

"Better go and get on dry clothes," suggested Frank.

"Oh, this job won't take us long to finish, now," answered Markham.

"Well, I've got some printing to deliver," said Bob. "Come over to the house after supper, fellows."

"All right," acquiesced Frank, but Markham said nothing. He acted subdued and worried until the cistern was finished. He stuck closely to the house after the work was done, and made some excuse for not going over to visit Bob and Darry after supper.

Frank was slightly disturbed at these actions — secretly he feared that a sight of the fellow Bob had called Dale Wacker had caused Markham to get out of sight. Frank wished he knew why.



Frank found his mother and Markham both reading when he came home, about nine o'clock. He kept his eye on the latter as he remarked to his mother that Darry had read to him a little news item he had gathered in for the *Herald* late that afternoon.

It was about a fellow named Dale Wacker, Frank narrated. It seemed he was on his way to the railroad depot, when an old German peddler to whom he had owed money for over two years recognized and hailed him.

The peddler gave Wacker a great scoring and demanded his money. A crowd gathered, and Wacker started on his way at a fast walk. The peddler whipped up his horse to keep pace with him, whilst administering a continuous tongue-lashing.

The sorry nag did not keep up with the procession as Wacker broke into a run. Seizing a basket of eggs, the peddler jumped down from the wagon. He was a big, fat, unwieldly person, but he pursued the fugitive vigorously.

The crowd hooted and yelled as the German began to pelt the eggs after the fugitive. Two eggs struck Wacker in the middle of the back. One shied off his hat and broke on the back of his head. Bespattered and hatless, the fellow reached the de-



pot just in time to grab the platform rail of the last car on a departing train.

"Oh, got out of town, did he?" asked Markham quite eagerly.

"Yes, it seems so — faster than he had calculated on," responded Frank.

"Won't be likely to come back again after that reception, eh?" said Markham.

"I should think not. He'll be afraid of something worse."

Markham brightened up. He acted like a different person at once. He laughed, told some funny stories, was his natural self once more, and Frank was very glad of it.

"Poor fellow," he mused. "He's got some harrowing secret on his mind, that's sure, and he doesn't want to meet certain people for some reason or other, and this Dale Wacker is one of them. Well, he's been true blue to me, and I won't worry him by asking about this mystery. It will come out some time, and if he's in danger of trouble I'll stick to him like a brother, for I know he hasn't got a grain of real badness in his nature."

With the morning all of Markham's recent disquietude seemed to have entirely disappeared. When they got down to the office he kept a close watch until nine o'clock.



"Mail's in, Frank," he announced at last, putting on his cap.

"All right," nodded Frank, keeping on with his writing.

"Fatal hour approaches. We shall soon know our doom," continued Markham in a mock-alarm way.

He picked up a new canvas mail satchel marked "F. M. O. H.," and started for the door.

"See here," hailed Frank, "don't you think you can about carry all of our first morning's mail in some modest pocket?"

"Don't care if I can. Big mail satchel makes a good business impression, see?" and Markham darted off, wondering if Frank's heart was beating as fast as his own over the suspense attached to their first mail results.

Frank was indeed anxious, but he tried to go on with his writing. All the same his nerves were on keen edge and his hand was a trifle unsteady, as Markham returned from the post office and placed the satchel on the desk before him.

"Eight letters," said Frank, drawing out the mail in the satchel. "That isn't so bad. Well, let us see what our correspondents have to say."

Frank cut open the end of the first missive, and Markham watched him like a ferret.



"No money in this one," reported Frank, the enclosure in hand. "Well, well, listen to this now! 'You are a frod. I bot an apple corer last munth, and it was no good. You out to be persecuted.'"

Frank was quite disappointed, and Markham gulped several times as each succeeding letter produced no money or stamps. Two people asked for a catalogue. One correspondent wanted a "Twelve Tools in One" sent to him, and if found satisfactory would remit forthwith.

Another correspondent sent an order for a ring, and wanted it "charged." Then there was a man who asked if they could furnish him with a cheap second-hand thrasher for his farm.

One client wrote that if they would send him samples of their entire list, he would show the goods in his town and possibly get them lots of customers.

"Ah," said Frank, feeling of the last letter, "here is something tangible, sure, Markham. I can feel the coin."

"Maybe it's a cent," suggested Markham, with a slight tinge of sarcasm.

"No, a ten-cent piece, sure enough," declared Frank. "For your puzzle, Markham, too."

"Yes," put in Markham, picking up the coin



that Frank had placed on his desk, "but the dime is — lead!"

Frank pulled a dismal face. Markham looked actually mad. Then their glances met. They broke into a hearty laugh mutually.

"Humph!" commented Markham.

"Amusing, isn't it?" asked Frank, trying hard to keep up his courage.

"Oh, well, there's the afternoon mail," suggested Markham, getting up and beginning to fold some more circulars. "Who expected any mail of consequence this morning, anyhow?"

Frank resumed his task of working on the catalogue. He whistled a cheery bar or two, felt too serious to keep it up, and went on with his work in a half-hearted way.

"This Frank's Mail Order House?" demanded a brisk voice, half an hour later.

"Don't you know it is?" challenged Frank, arising to welcome Ned Davis, a bright young fellow, who was the messenger of the local bank.

"All right," chirped Ned. "Got a letter this morning from a correspondent at Bayview. Enclosure. Man running a small store there asks us if Frank's Mail Order House is a reliable concern. If so, instructs us to place this order with you."



Ned importantly spread out quite a voluminous order list before Frank.

"Accompanied with the cash," added Ned, and set down a crisp, encouraging-looking five-dollar bill beside the document.

"Oh!" ejaculated Markham, almost falling off his chair with surprise.

"Ned," said Frank, with a touch of genuine feeling, "thank you."

"That's all right," responded Ned. "We're simply working to get your bank account when it runs up into the thousands, see?"

"Will it ever, I wonder?" murmured Frank.

"Isn't that a nest egg?" challenged the practical young financier.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A SUSPICIOUS VISITOR

FRANK looked up from his work with an eager flush on his face. Markham, who had gone to the post office, was returning. His light, springy step coming up the walk, and cheery, ringing whistle told Frank that he was the bearer of good news.

"Afternoon mail," sang out Markham, putting the satchel down on Frank's desk. "And she's a cracker-jack!"

"Good," said Frank.

"Over thirty letters," continued Markham gaily. "Stamps in some, coin in others. My finger tips just itched to feel those letters, Frank. I just had to do it. Oh, if this suspense keeps up I'll be rifling the mails next."

Frank slit all the letters in turn. Four postal cards asking for catalogues were promptly disposed of. The first of the letters was from a country newspaper offering reduced terms for advertising.

There was an application for an agency. No.



3 wanted to be hired in the office — could count money and put on postage stamps fast.

Frank was not given to being very demonstrative on any occasion. As, however, he now began to stare at the next letter he opened and almost uttered a shout, Markham knew that something very much out of the ordinary had come up.

“What is it, Frank?” he questioned eagerly.

“Markham,” said Frank, quite unnerved with excitement, “it’s a big, big order.”

“How big?” demanded Markham. “Quick, I’m on the edge of nervous prostration.”

“Fifty to one hundred dollars,” announced Frank, in quite a husky voice. “A few more of such orders and we’ll know where we stand. It’s from the owner of a general store at Decatur. He writes that he has purchased from an advertising agency fifty-two picture rebuses — easy ones — one for each week in the year. Accompanying them are fifty-two separate advertisements. These he intends to insert in his weekly paper. He wants to offer each week ten prizes for the ten persons who first appear at his store with correct solutions of the rebuses.”

“I see,” nodded Markham — “good idea.”

“He wants us to designate fifty-two novelties that we can supply, about half and half ten-and-



twenty-cent articles. He will take ten of each article, or five hundred and twenty in all. Think of it, Markham!"

"It's grand, yes, just grand!" declared Markham, in a tone of suppressed excitement.

"He says he will trust to our judgment to select the most catchy novelties, only he expects us to give him special figures on the lot."

"Of course you'll do it, Frank?"

"Yes, and make a neat profit, too. Well, this is encouraging."

"Yes, Frank, that one order will cover the cost of all the circularizing we have done to date. Hello! hello! hello!"

In three different crescendo tones Markham tallied off three letters which Frank opened next in turn, and in each instance with cash results — two silver dimes and thirty cents in postage stamps.

When the entire mail was opened, Frank had a little heap at his elbow representing six dollars and eighty cents, three dollars of which was to pay for two rings.

"Seven orders for your puzzle, Markham," announced Frank, "besides what goes in the big order. Only one apple corer ordered. I'm afraid my prized invention is a frost."

"Not at all," dissented Markham. "Look



here, it's plain from the letter you got this morning that the Riverton hardware man had already used at least some of the names in the mail order lists. If I were you, Frank, in any new printed matter you get out I would refer to your apple corer as a decided improvement on the old one. I think, even, I would illustrate these improvements."

"An excellent idea, Markham," declared Frank. "Further, I don't know but it would be a good thing to offer one of the new corers, free on return of an old one, charging only the postage."

"Oh, we're learning," declared Markham, buoyantly. "This thing is a decided go."

Frank was immersed in business during the rest of that week. Markham proved an energetic and reliable assistant. There were circulars to send out, orders to fill, letters to write.

Saturday night they had to work till eleven o'clock to clean up their desks. Frank was rushing the catalogue copy. Mrs. Haven was busy making new drawings, which had to be sent to the city to be photo-engraved. Orders, too, were sent daily to the city supply houses.

Up at the novelty factory they were filling Frank's first big order for a thousand of the wire puzzles and a thousand of the new apple corers.



This latter device was really a very meritorious article. Retaining the form and dimensions of the original sheath, Frank had set inside two moving pieces of tin that acted as knives. These ran into a spiral tube which penetrated the apple without injuring it, and a twist on a knob cut the core out clean as a whistle.

Monday morning's mail was the largest yet received, due, Frank believed, to some little advertising Haven Bros. had caused to be inserted in a few neighboring country newspapers.

His little capital was now again nearly at the two hundred dollar mark. About noon Frank made up a package of about two hundred dollars. He had arranged to pay this amount to Haven Bros., draw against it if he ran short of funds, otherwise leave it in their hands to pay for the catalogue, which would be quite an expensive job.

Markham had gone to the post-office with some mail. Frank looked up as a footstep sounded on the walk outside of the office door.

It was not Markham, as Frank at first expected. Instead, a person he regarded in a decidedly unfavorable light came into view.

The visitor was Dale Wacker, the boy Bob



Haven had designated to Frank the day that Markham made his sensational dive into the cistern.

He was not dressed as jauntily as on that occasion. His appearance was shabby and unkempt now. He slouched up to the door with a sneak-thief air, yet withal the brass and effrontery of a person possessed of few fine sensibilities.

"Say," spoke Wacker to Frank, "you run this shop?"

"I'm interested in this business, yes," answered Frank distantly.

"Pretty good graft? Looking for some such fake myself. What I wanted to know, though, was about one of your samples in the show case out there."

"Well?" demanded Frank.

"That wire puzzle."

"What about it?"

"Where did you run across it?"

Frank did not like the speech nor manner of his visitor.

"Is that particularly any of your business?" he asked.

"Why, you see, just curious about it, that's all," stammered Wacker, somewhat taken aback at



Frank's sharp challenge. "Do you own it?"

Frank's eye flashed with manifest resentment at Wacker's cool effrontery.

"See here," he said pretty firmly, "I have no time to waste answering idle and impertinent questions," and turned away from the door.

"Well, I'd seen it before, that's all," muttered Wacker.

"Oh, I fancy not," said Frank.

"Oh, yes, I did. Huh! guess I did — I was with the fellow who first made it when he got it up."

Frank was surprised. He must have shown it to the keen-eyed fellow quizzing him, for Wacker exclaimed:

"Aha — interested now, hain't you? Tell you something more: the owner made me a duplicate of his original puzzle, and — there it is."

And to Frank's amazement Mr. Dale Wacker pulled from his pocket a crude copy of the wire puzzle.

It was the exact counterpart of the one Markham had furnished as a model for those now being sold broadcast by Frank's Mail Order House.



## CHAPTER XIX

### MISSING

FRANK was a good deal upset. In the light of the cistern episode and the knowledge that Markham seemed afraid to meet certain people, he believed that the advent of his present visitor boded no good for his friend and helper.

As Dale Wacker showed the wire puzzle, stating that he knew its inventor, Frank felt that he was in the presence of a mystery.

"Let me look at that, will you?" he said.

"Sure," grinned Wacker. "Why not? Take a good look, too. Seems familiar? Quite the right thing, eh?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Frank.

"Why, just this," retorted Wacker: "How do you come to be selling an article that no one has a right to sell except my friend who made it? I happen to know he invented that puzzle. I was with him when he did."

"When was that?" asked Frank.

"Oh, about six months ago."



"And where?"

"Now you're asking questions, hey?" said Wacker, with a cunning air. "You tell me first: do you know the fellow who made that puzzle?"

"What's his name?" asked Frank.

"Dick Welmore."

"Never heard of him."

"Aha!" cried Dale Wacker triumphantly, "then I've got you. I say, young fellow, you're violating the law, you are. See here, I'm hard up. I know where Dick Welmore is snug and tight. If you don't make it worth my while, I'll go to him and have you prosecuted for stealing his invention."

"Get out of here," cried Frank, with flashing eyes.

"Hold on, now. Say, give me a job, and I'll keep mum. Say, I can write a good hand. Once I took stock, see —"

"Yes, I reckon you've taken stock to your cost, if what I hear is true. March out, and it won't be healthy for you to come around here again."

"I can make you trouble."

"Try it."

Frank gave Wacker a decided push through the open doorway. Wacker was muttering under his breath all kinds of dire threats.



At exactly that moment Frank looked along the walk to the street at the echo of a cherry whistle. It was instantly checked. Markham, tripping towards the office, halted with a shock. Like a flash he turned at a sight of Wacker. He disappeared so quickly that Frank wondered if Wacker got a clear look at him.

The latter, with a malignant growl at Frank, went away without another word. In some perplexity Frank sat down at his desk, thinking hard and fast.

"I just couldn't truckle with that fellow," he said. "Dick Welmore, eh? Can that be Markham's real name? Evidently, though, this Wacker doesn't know Markham is here. He thinks he is somewhere else, 'snug and tight.' Oh, bother! there's only one right course to take in such a case, and I'll follow it."

Frank decided that at quitting time he would lock himself and Markham into the office, and ask for an explanation of his fear and dread of meeting Dale Wacker.

"It won't be to Markham's discredit, I'll guarantee," reflected Frank. "He's square, if there ever was a square boy. Here he is now."

Markham appeared, breathing hard and looking excited. He tried, however, to appear calm. His



face was quite pale. Frank saw that he was under an intense nervous strain.

"Oh, Markham," said Frank, not indicating that he noticed his friend's perturbation, "I want you to take that money to Darry Haven."

"All right," answered Markham, glancing over his shoulder towards the street.

"Be careful of it, won't you now?" directed Frank, with a little laugh. "Remember, it's our entire capital, and here's the mailing lists. Tell Darry to get them set up and printed just as quick as he can. We need them at once."

Frank had decided to have the mailing list names printed, each on a separate line with a broad margin. This he did so they could keep a permanent record of the result of using each name. Besides that, in the fire at Riverton the lists had got charred, and some of them were brittle and broken away, and some pages hard to decipher.

Markham clasped the wallet containing the money tightly in one hand, thrust it into his outside coat pocket, and tucked the rolled-up lists under his arm.

"Be back soon," he said.

"All right, do so. Want to have a little talk with you."



Markham looked up quickly, hesitated, gave a sigh, and started rapidly down the walk.

"I'll have it over and done with, soon as he comes back," reflected Frank. "Poor fellow. Something's on his mind. I'm going to help him get rid of it."

Frank resumed his task. He was soon engrossed in finishing up a page of writing.

"Good," he said finally, with satisfaction, "the last copy for the catalogue. It will make twenty-four printed pages. The cuts I have had made and the cuts the supply houses have loaned me make a very fine showing. Well, the first two weeks show up pretty good. Business started, and paying expenses. Why, that's queer," exclaimed Frank with a start, as he chanced to glance at the clock—"Markham has been gone a full half-hour."

It was queer. Markham had less than three squares to go on his errand. Usually he made the trip to Haven Bros. in five minutes.

Frank walked to the door and looked out. He stood there, growing restless and anxious, as ten minutes went by. Then he grew restless, put on his cap, waited five minutes longer, and, closing the office door, went out to the street.



"Pshaw," he said, looking up and down the street, "what am I worrying about? Got that Dale Wacker on my mind, and it has upset me. Markham is probably chatting with Bob Haven. Well, I've gone so far, I'll step over to the printing office and see."

Frank walked rapidly to the principal street, and up the flight of stairs in a business block to Haven Bros.'s office.

As he entered he noticed all hands busy at cases and presses. Bob, shirt sleeves rolled up, was working on some chases on an imposing stone. Darry was reading proof at his desk.

But there was no Markham. Frank experienced a sensation of dread for which he could not account. He tried to keep cool, but the first word he spoke as he approached Darry made the latter look up quickly.

"Got the money I sent you, Darry?" asked Frank.

"Why, no — did you send it?"

"Yes — over half-an-hour ago."

"Who by?"

"Markham."

"Oh, then, he's doing some other errand first," said Darry. "Sit down, if you're going to wait for him."



"No, I'll watch them doing things," answered Frank, with an assumed lightness of tone.

He strolled about the neat little office, pretending to be interested. It was a dead failure. A lump of lead seemed bearing him down. Frank glanced at his watch. An hour had passed since he had sent Markham on his errand.

"Be back soon, Darry," he said, and went out of the printing office with a dull, sick feeling at heart.

Frank returned to his office. Markham was not there. He went back to the print shop.

"Markham been here yet?" he inquired in a failing voice to Darry.

"Not yet, Frank."

"Then something's wrong," suddenly burst out Frank, unable longer to endure the strain of suspense and dread.

"Why, how pale you are," began Darry, rising from his chair.

"Yes, Darry," said Frank in a quivering tone—"Markham is missing, and with him my mailing lists and over two hundred dollars in cash."



## CHAPTER XX

### A BAD BUSINESS

FRANK came down to the office the next morning looking haggard and troubled. Stet was hanging around the door.

"Darry Haven told me to wait till you came down, and then let him know," said the little fellow.

"All right," nodded Frank in a dull way.

Stet darted off with his usual elfish nimbleness. Frank unlocked the door and sat down before his desk rather gloomily. He mechanically arranged some papers. Darry was with him before he had accomplished much. Stet accompanied him.

"Well, Frank," questioned Darry, "any word of Markham?"

"Not a trace, Darry."

"Strange, isn't it?" observed Darry in a musing way. "I declare I can't understand it."

"Nor I," said Frank. "It's him I'm thinking of, not of myself. I haven't slept a wink all night."



Honest, Darry, if he was an own brother I couldn't feel more anxious. Mother is quite as worried. I went everywhere about town last evening till the stores shut up. I telephoned several neighboring towns. I saw trainmen around the depot."

"And found no one who had seen Markham after you sent him on that errand with the money and the mailing lists?"

"Not a soul, Darry."

"How do you explain it?"

"I can't. I suppose some people who don't know Markham as I do, would say I was a fool to take up a stranger and put so much trust in him, that it served me right to have him run away with all I have in the world first chance he got. Well, let me tell you, Darry, that boy wouldn't do me a wrong turn wilfully for a million dollars, and I know it."

Darry sighed and was silent. He had liked Markham, but his young business career had brought him in contact with so many weak and absolutely bad people, that secretly he feared that Markham had yielded to temptation, and they would not hear of him again.

"Have you no theory as to the reason why Markham should be missing so mysteriously?" he asked.



"Why, yes, I have, in a way, Darry," responded Frank, "but it is all guess-work. I told you last night about some secret in his life."

"Yes, I know," nodded Darry.

"I also told you that I was convinced that Dale Wacker knew Markham, and that Markham for some reason dreaded meeting him."

"It certainly looked that way, judging from Markham's actions."

"Very well, I think they ran into each other after Markham went on the errand to you. Wacker is a blackmailer, as his talk to me about the puzzle plainly shows. Does he know something about Markham that might make him trouble? It certainly looks that way. He may have terrorized Markham into running away."

"All right, if that is true, then Markham, if he is an honest boy, will send back your money and the mailing lists."

"Of course he will," declared Frank. "I've been expecting to receive them every hour."

"And if he doesn't," suggested Darry, somewhat skeptically.

"If he doesn't," repeated Frank, slowly but steadily, "then make up your mind to one thing."

"And what is that?"

"That Markham is in the power of some one



who holds him a prisoner, and can't get word to me."

"H'm," said Darry simply. Frank's eyes flashed.

"Furthermore," he went on, "assuming that, I shall make it my business to investigate along that line, I shall never lose faith in Markham's honesty and fidelity to me till I have used every endeavor to find out when, where and why he dropped out of sight so mysteriously."

"You're a staunch friend, you are," commented Darry. "In the meantime, though, Frank, your capital is gone. Worse than that, the whole basis of your business has gone with it."

"Yes, the mailing lists," said Frank. "I've thought that all out, Darry. You will have to stop work on the catalogue and the rest of the printing. I can't pay for the work."

"We'll trust you."

"No," said Frank steadily, "I can't run into debt."

"We might spare a little cash till — till you hear from the other,"

"I won't involve my friends. I have planned it all out. My mother is coming down to the office to take care of the little business that will come in from the advertising."



"And what will you do?" asked Darry curiously.

"I have arranged to hire a horse and wagon. I shall go out and visit small towns and sell from door to door, or even from the wagon, till I hear from that missing money, or get on my feet again."

"You're a good one," pronounced Darry with an admiring sparkle in his eye, slapping Frank heartily on the shoulder. "You're a stubborn one, too, so I won't intrude offers of assistance only to be turned down."

"All the time," resumed Frank, "I shall be looking out for a trace of Markham. See here, Darry, I can't get that Dale Wacker off my mind. Who are his companions? Where does he hang out? How am I going to set a watch on him?"

"He may not even be in town," suggested Darry. "You know Bob and I went all over Pleasantville last evening, like yourself seeking a trace of Markham. It looked as if Wacker had flashed into town and out again. We didn't run across him, and we didn't find anybody who had seen him since late in the afternoon."

"Say, can I speak a word?" piped in an anxious voice.

It was little Stet who had spoken. Frank and



Darry had forgotten all about him. Now Stet got up timorously from the door step.

"Oh, it's you," said Darry. "Heard all we've said, too, I suppose, Stet?"

"Yes, I have," replied Stet. "Had to — ought to — I'm interested, I am. I like you. I like Mr. Newton. You're both my friends. I like Markham, too. He gave Hemp Carson, the *Eagle* manager, a setting down for pitching onto me. I don't like Dale Wacker. Huh! hadn't ought to. He robbed me of two dollars once. Well, Dale Wacker is in Pleasantville. I saw him this morning. He came in on a farmer's wagon from somewhere out of town."

"That's news, anyway," said Darry.

"You were going to give me my regular ten days' vacation next week, you know," continued Stet to Darry. "Make it begin to-day, and I'll soon find out for you all there is to find out about Dale Wacker's doings."

"But that is hardly a vacation, Stet?" suggested Frank.

"It will be," chuckled the little fellow, "if I can get my two dollars' worth of satisfaction out of him by showing him up."

"All right," said Darry, "try it, Stet, if you want to."



Stet went away forthwith. Frank went into details with Darry as to the mail order business. It must remain partially inactive until something encouraging developed.

The morning mail was a pretty good one. About ten o'clock Mrs. Ismond came down to the office, and Frank initiated his mother into the business routine.

"Just get the mail each day, and fill what orders you can," said Frank. "When you can't fill an order, return the money. You see, mother, I want to take the bulk of stock on hand with me for quick sales, and I can't order any more until I get some money ahead."

Frank put in two hours about town trying to look up Markham. The result was quite as discouraging as upon the day previous. He closed an arrangement for the hire of a horse and a light wagon, and packed up some goods at the office, ready for his trip into the country.

Mrs. Ismond, with a woman's instinctive capacity for neatness, had the office in attractive order by late afternoon, and all the work attended to.

"Don't get discouraged, Frank," she said, as they were on their way home. "It won't take a great deal of money to keep up the business in a small way. I sent out a hundred circulars this



afternoon, and I will keep on at that average while you are away."

"Why," spoke Frank, "how can you do that, with no mailing list addresses?"

"Oh, I set my wits at work and made quite a discovery," responded Mrs. Ismond with a bright smile. "The Pleasantville *Herald* has quite a list of exchanges. I asked Darry to send me some. They come from all over the State. I selected a number of promising names from little news items in the papers. For instance: I took girls' names from church and society items, and boys' names from baseball club items and the like. Good, fresh names, Frank — don't you see?"

"I do see," said Frank, "and it's a grand idea, mother."

After supper Mrs. Ismond went upstairs to make up a little parcel of collars, handkerchiefs and the like for her son's journey.

Frank looked up from the county map from which he was formulating a route, as his mother reappeared. At a glance he saw that she was very much agitated.

"Oh, Frank!" she panted, sinking into a chair pale and distressed-looking.

"Why, what's the matter, mother?" exclaimed Frank, arising quickly to his feet.



Mrs. Ismond had a worn yellow sheet of paper in her hand.

"Markham," she said, in a sad, pained way. "I was getting out some neckties for you, and by mistake opened the bureau drawer where he kept his belongings. I found this."

"What is it, mother?" asked Frank, taking the paper from her hand. He saw for himself, and his face turned quite as white and troubled as her own.

"Too bad — too bad," said Frank, looking down at the time-worn sheet of paper in a disheartened way.



## CHAPTER XXI

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

IT was a depressing discovery that Mrs. Ismond had made. Frank sat staring at the paper in his hand in silence for some minutes.

This was a printed sheet. It was headed: "Reward — One Hundred Dollars." In short, the warden of the Juvenile Reformatory at Linwood, offered that amount for the return to that institution of an escaped inmate — Richard Markham Welmore.

"Yes, it is our Markham," murmured Frank — "that is his middle name. The description answers him exactly," and again Frank said in a troubled way: "Too bad — too bad."

Frank knew what his mother was thinking of — that they had harbored a convicted criminal, who had weakly yielded to temptation, beggaring them, and going back to his old evil ways.

He now knew what Dale Wacker meant when he spoke of the inventor of the wire puzzle as being in a "snug, tight place." Markham had



sought relief from his irksome confinement getting up the pleasant little novelty that had taken so well. Evidently Wacker, when he first called on Frank, was not aware of the fact that Markham had escaped.

Wacker had probably once himself been an inmate of the reformatory. He knew its rules and routine. Coming across Markham on his way to Haven Bros., what more natural, Frank reasoned, than that he should take advantage of this knowledge? His recognition by Wacker would crush Markham. Had Wacker terrified him so that he had led him to some quiet spot, bargained with him, robbed him, sent him back to the reformatory, and laid claim to the reward?

"I am going to find out," cried Frank, starting for his cap, but instantly quieting down again as he reflected farther.

His impulse was to hurry downtown and telegraph the reformatory at Linwood for information. Suddenly, however, he reflected that if his surmises were wrong, and things turned out differently than he theorized, he would simply be putting the authorities on the track of the unfortunate Markham.

"Mother," he said, "nothing will make me believe that Markham voluntarily stole my money.



No, this Dale Wacker had a hand in this disappearance. Perhaps poor Markham met him and fled, and is in hiding. We may hear from him yet."

"But, Frank," suggested Mrs. Ismond in a broken tone of voice, "we are sure now that Markham was a — a bad boy."

"Why so?" asked Frank.

"He was the inmate of a reformatory."

"When I think of the old wasted days in my own life when I ran away from home," said Frank, "and the evil men I met who would have got me into any kind of trouble to further their own schemes, and I innocently walking into their trap, I shall give Markham the benefit of a doubt, every time. What right have we to assume that he was not a victim of wrong? No, no! He was a true friend, an honest worker. I won't desert or forget him until I have cleared up all this mystery."

Frank was up before five o'clock the next morning. He had just finished cutting a week's supply of kindling wood in the wood shed, when Stet popped into view over the back fence.

Stet tried to look like a real detective. He glanced back over his shoulder. He even said "Hist!" in first hailing Frank. Then he asked:

"Going away to-day?"



"I've got to, Stet," answered Frank. "Have you been looking up that Wacker fellow?"

"I've been doing nothing else," answered Stet, putting on a serious, careworn look. "Say, he's a bad one. Hangs out at the worst places on Railroad Street, and plays cards all the time."

"Throwing away his money, eh?"

"He don't seem to have much. No," said Stet, "I saw him borrow from two or three chums. But he's got great prospects, I heard him say. He's waiting for somebody to come to Pleasantville, or for something to happen. You leave it to me. I'll watch him like a ferret, only you'd better leave word where I can find you, if anything important comes up."

"All right, Stet. My mother will know where I am each day I am gone."

"And say," continued Stet, "I want you to say something to me."

"Say something to you, Stet?" repeated Frank in a puzzled way.

"Uh — huh."

"What?"

"I want you to look at me fierce, and frown, and say that you order me out of your place, and if I show up again you'll break every bone in my body."



"See here —" began Frank in wonderment.

"Now, you just say it," persisted Stet. "I know my business," and he blinked and chuckled craftily.

"All right — here goes."

"Good as a play," declared Stet, as Frank went through the rigmarole. "Now I needn't tell any lies. Thrown out by my friends, discharged from my job, O — O — Oh!" and Stet affected sobs of the deepest misery. "Had Bob Haven kicked me — not hard — out of the shop last night. See? Object of abuse and sympathy. Oh, I'm fixed now to play Mr. Dale Wacker good and strong."

Stet disappeared the way he had come in a high state of elation. Frank went into the house for breakfast. He walked as far as the office with his mother. Then he went to the livery stable where he had hired the turnout.

He was soon on the road. Frank tried to forget the anxieties of the mail order business and his missing friend. He planned to cover six little towns by nightfall.

Frank had good luck from the start. At a crossroads there was a country schoolhouse, a general store and some twenty houses. The man running the store was just stocking in for the fall term of school. Frank came in the nick of time. He



sold the man over ten dollars worth of notions and novelties.

Watering his horse at a roadhouse, a little later on, he interested some loungers on the veranda. Frank got rid of two rings, a cheap watch, a pedometer and three of Markham's puzzles.

At noon he took dinner at Carrollville, quite a good-sized town. A small circus was playing here. Frank conceived the idea of buying a privilege to sell on the circus grounds. The manager wanted ten dollars for a permit, however, so Frank took up his stand near the railway depot.

As the crowds came for their trains at five o'clock, he opened up his novelty stock.

"A pretty thrifty day," mused Frank, an hour later, as he started for his final stop of the day at Gray's Lake. "Profits eleven dollars and twenty cents. Why, thirty days of this kind of trade will give me back my lost capital."

Gray's Lake was a settlement and a summer resort. Frank put up the horse, got a good supper, and then selected the newest and most salable of the trinkets and novelties he carried in stock.

Among these was a good assortment of leather souvenir postal cards, just then a decided novelty outside of the large cities. He had brought along a large jewelry tray. This he suspended by a



strap from his neck, and went up to the big hotel at the end of the lake.

A group of girls in a summer house running out over the water furnished Frank with his first customers. He sold two friendship rings and sixteen postal cards.

A crowd of idle men took fire on the puzzle proposition, as two men examining the wire devices got rating one another as to their respective ability to get the ring off first. A dozen puzzles were purchased in as many minutes.

Frank went the rounds of the verandas, meeting with very fair success. The people there had plenty of money to spare, time hung rather heavy on their hands, and they welcomed his arrival as a diversion.

Frank grew to have a decided respect for Markham's little puzzle. He had struck the right crowd to sell it to, this time. At the end of an hour fully fifty persons could be seen on the well-lighted verandas and in the hotel rotunda, working over the clever puzzle. An occasional utterance of satisfaction would greet the solution of the puzzle.

"Markham has certainly left me a money-winner, if he never came back," reflected Frank.

He was passing along a lighted walk near the



lake beach, when a young lady ran past him towards a group of friends.

A foppishly-dressed man with a great black moustache was hastening after her, but she was calling laughingly back at him:

"No, no, count, you would take all night getting that ring off — I'll try some one else."

"It ees a meestake. Allow me to try once more, my dear young lady."

"Hello!" ejaculated Frank, with a violent start. Then in a flash he slipped the tray from place, set it hastily on a vacant bench, and as the man was passing by him caught him deliberately by the sleeve.

"Sare!" challenged the man, with a supercilious stare. "Oh!" he added, wilting down in an instant.

"I suppose you don't know me?" demanded Frank.

"Nevare, sare."

"I am Frank Newton, of Greenville, and, for all your false moustache and broken English, you are Gideon Purnell."

"Let go!" hissed the man, with a rapid glance at the group just beyond them.

"No," replied Frank firmly, only tightening his grasp on the man's coat sleeve. "I have been



looking for you for over a year. I knew I should find you some time. I have found you now."

"What do you want?" stammered his crest-fallen companion.

"Ten minutes' quiet conversation with you."

"About what?"

"You know. You were the tool Mr. Dorsett used to rob my mother of her fortune. He got what he was after. You overstepped yourself. You forged two names in your crooked dealings, as Mr. Beach, our lawyer at Greenville, has the proof."

"Boy," said Purnell, in a low, quick tone, "don't make a rumpus here. Come and see me to-morrow, and I will do the square thing by you."

"You'll do it now," declared Frank definitely, "or I will expose you to the people here, and wire Mr. Beach for instructions."

"At least let me go and make some excuse to my friends yonder," pleaded "the count."

"Go ahead," said Frank.



## CHAPTER XXII

### GOOD NEWS

FRANK kept a close watch on Purnell. He had reason to do so. Upon what he might by threats or persuasion compel this man to divulge, hung all the future prospects of his mother ever recovering her stolen fortune.

When Frank's step-father died, this person, one of his former associates, had produced notes and deeds apparently giving him the ownership to everything that Mr. Ismond owned.

There were many flaws to his claim. Mrs. Ismond's lawyer, Mr. Beach, discovered two arrant forgeries. Before any action at law could be taken, however, Purnell transferred all the property to "an innocent purchaser," Dorsett.

Mrs. Ismond brought suit against the latter, but even Mr. Beach did not believe the law would force him to restore what he claimed to have bought for a valid consideration. Their only hope seemed to be to find Purnell, who had disappeared. If through him they could connect Dor-



sett with a conspiracy, Mrs. Ismond would win her case.

This was the first time since he had fled from Greenville that Frank had seen this man. Now he forgot his sample case, Markham, and the whole mail order business amid the keen importance of keeping track of the slippery fugitive, and forcing from him a confession.

Purnell approached the party of young ladies, still acting the exquisite and playing the foreign count he pretended to be. He bowed and smirked, and backed away to Frank.

Instantly his face lost its mask. With a scowl he dropped his affected foreign drawl.

"You will have it out, here and now, will you?" he growled, grinding his teeth viciously.

"Yes, I'll have it out, or you in," responded Frank pointedly.

"Then come to my room."

The false count led the way into the hotel, hurried up a staircase, and, unlocking a door on the second floor, ushered Frank into a room. He lit the gas and threw himself into a chair, glaring at Frank in a savage and desperate way.

"You're a determined young man, you are," he observed.

"Why not?" demanded Frank. "It has been



the resolve of my life to hunt you down. If you escape me this time, I shall find you later. You are masquerading here under false pretences. I can expose you. Should I telegraph Mr. Beach, he would at once send an officer to arrest you."

"That won't help your case any," observed the man.

"I don't care. It will prove that Dorsett had a criminal for a partner, and that will influence the court when my mother's suit comes to trial."

"Name your terms," spoke Purnell suddenly.

"Very well," said Frank gravely: "you helped rob my mother of the estate her husband left her. What you got out of it I don't know, but it seems to have made it necessary for you to continue the career of a fugitive and a fraud.

"What I got!" snapped out Purnell, springing to his feet in hot anger. "I got what everybody gets who deals with that old rascal — the bad end of the trade, drat him!"

"I'll leave you alone to your own devices," said Frank, "I'll promise to see that you get some money when my mother recovers hers, if you will write out, sign and swear to the facts of your conspiracy with Dorsett against my mother."

"All right," answered Purnell, after a moment



of thought. "I've got some papers that apply to the matter. They are in my sitting room. I'll get them."

The speaker walked to a door, turned a key and disappeared beyond the threshold. Frank sat awaiting his return. He congratulated himself on the ease with which he had intimidated the man to his purposes.

Two minutes passed by, and Frank became impatient, five, and his suspicions were aroused. He walked to the door and knocked, tried it, pushed it open, and found himself, not in a connecting room, but in a side corridor.

"Well, he has slipped me," instantly decided Frank.

He realized that he had been tricked badly. Frank went to the hotel office to make some inquiries, made a tour of the grounds, and, finally surmising that the object of his search had fled for good, regained his sample tray and returned to the town.

Frank did not stay all night at the local hotel, although he went there to ask for mail. He had given his mother a list of the hotels in the various towns he expected to visit, secured from a guide book.

There was a brief note from his mother. It



imparted no particular news, saying only that she was attending to orders as they came in.

Frank found a cheap lodging, and was back at the hotel at the lake by six o'clock the next morning. A brief talk with the clerk convinced him that Purnell would not be likely to return to that hostelry.

He had gone, owing a week's bill, and the two valises left in his room were found to be filled with bricks.

"I've missed my man this time," reflected Frank, as he hitched up the horse an hour later. "I may as well go right on my route. I'll find him again, some time."

At Derby, Frank upon his arrival went to the telegraph office. He sent a message to the reformatory at Linwood, asking if one Richard Welmore was still an inmate of that institution. He asked, further, if one Dale Wacker had ever been a prisoner there.

He went on selling in the town, with fair returns, until mid-afternoon. A reply to his message awaited him on his next visit to the telegraph office. It read:

"Dale Wacker paroled on bond of his uncle. Richard Welmore escaped about six months since.



One hundred dollars reward for his capture. If know his whereabouts, wire at once."

"That upsets one of my theories," thought Frank. "Markham has not been captured for the reward."

Brandon was his next town. The day following he made Essex. He was pretty tired as he drove to its livery stable, about eight o'clock in the evening.

After supper he went to the local hotel, and asked if there was any mail for Frank Newton.

"No," replied the clerk whom he questioned, "but here's a telegram been waiting here for you since noon."

"Thank you for your trouble," said Frank, rather anxiously tearing open the yellow envelope.

"That's all right," nodded the hotel clerk. "Good news, I reckon?" he smiled, as Frank's face lit up magically at a hasty personal of the message.

"I should say so!" declared Frank.

The message was from Darry Haven, at Pleasantville, and it read:

"Come home at once. Money found."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### A RIVAL CONCERN

"I CALL that extraordinary," declared Bob Haven.

"Certainly a sensational and a puzzling piece of business," echoed his brother, Darry.

"It is the best news I have had for a long time," said Frank, buoyantly. "I tell you, fellows, you don't know what a load it has lifted from my mind."

"I should think so," nodded Darry — "to get back all that two hundred dollars, when you had given it up as lost."

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Frank's clothing was covered with dust. His eyes looked tired and sleepy. Upon the receipt of the telegram at Essex, he had hitched up the horse promptly and started for Pleasantville.

Darry welcomed him with effusion, and he and Bob at once led Frank into their little editorial sanctum.



There were some quick developments, and now Frank sat, a queerly decorated sheet of paper in his hand. On the table before him was the wallet which had disappeared four days previous with Markham.

"Tell your story all over again, slowly and carefully," said Frank to Darry. "It's something to get back that money, but it's a good deal more to find out what has become of Markham."

"Well," said Darry, "it's just as I told you. Yesterday noon in our mail we found that letter you have. As you see, it has an envelope bearing our name and address printed. We send these out when we solicit business, and I supposed it was some new customer asking an estimate on a printing job. Judge of my surprise, when I found enclosed that letter."

"Yes," murmured Frank, "it's a queer-looking affair."

"You can see how it was put together. It must have taken hours for its sender to cut all kinds of letters from a printed newspaper, and slowly and patiently paste them onto that blank sheet. Letter by letter he built up those words and sentences."

Frank once more read over the letter in his hands, which ran:



“tell frAnk newTon Money is beHind coAl BoX, thiRd flooR, YoUr buiLDiNg — mARk-HAm.”

“Well,” resumed Darry,” Bob and I went up stairs here at once. None of the offices on the third floor has been occupied for a long time. In the hall is a big box with a slanting cover, to hold fuel for tenants in winter time. Everything was dirty, and plainly across the dusty box cover it showed where someone had recently rested, or been pushed over against the wall. We pulled out the box. Sure enough, in the four-inch space behind the box was your money.”

“Then a hot wire, and here you are,” observed Bob briskly.

“See here, fellows,” said Frank, “I think I can figure this thing out.”

“Go ahead,” encouraged Darry.

“Markham sent that letter. He didn’t write, because he had no pencil. A pencil is usually an easy thing to get, so he must have been shut up somewhere. He found in his pocket a sheet of paper —”

“Oh, by the way,” here interrupted Darry,” I forgot to explain something. I recognize the



sheet of paper as a blank sample I gave Markham, enclosed in that same envelope, stamped, to give to Mr. Dawes up at the novelty works when he went there again. Mr. Dawes asked for a sample of one linen letter paper. If he wanted a lot, he was to write the amount on the sheet, and mail to us."

"Well," continued Frank," somehow Markham made paste — probably out of a piece of bread. He compiled that letter."

"But how did he get it mailed?" suggested Bob.

"Suppose he was a prisoner, and threw it from a window into the road, chancing its discovery and mailing by some passer-by."

"That's so," nodded Darry. "I believe you are correct in your conclusions, Frank. As to the mailing lists, which Markham also had with him, that's a later mystery to develop."

"Now then," spoke Frank, "I think I can also figure out something else. I believe that Dale Wacker followed Markham. He was probably right on his heels when Markham entered this building. Markham saw him, got scared, and, to evade him, ran up to the third floor. There he found no rooms open to hide in. He was cor-



nered, intimidated, maybe attacked by Wacker. He thought of that two hundred dollars, and dropped it behind the fuel box. Then —”

Frank paused here, and shook his head in doubt and perplexity.

“Poor Markham,” commented Bob. “It looks likely that he is held a prisoner somewhere. Maybe because his captor knows he threw away that package of money, and won’t let him go free till he tells where. Anyhow, he’s a good one, surmounting all the difficulties of his situation and getting that letter to you.”

“I suppose you will take up the mail order business actively again, now you are in funds?” suggested Darry.

“Surely,” said Frank. “Here, take the money and hurry up the catalogue.”

Frank felt immensely relieved as he proceeded to his office. His mind, however, was full of plans looking to the discovery of Markham’s place of captivity.

The letter had been mailed at Hazelhurst, a mining town about thirty miles distant. Frank noted this fact, determining to make that town the starting point of his investigations, as soon as he got present pressing business in such a shape that



he might leave the office in charge of his mother for a day or two.

Mrs. Ismond was very happy over Frank's return, and greatly pleased over the recovery of the missing money. She had quite an encouraging report to make concerning orders received during that day and the one preceding.

"Oh, by the way, Frank," she said, suddenly recollecting something, "here is a letter addressed to you marked 'personal.' I found it pushed under the office door this morning."

"It's from Stet," said Frank, glancing at the enclosure, which interested him very much.

"On account of our strained relations," wrote Stet, "being ordered from your premises and kicked out of Haven Bros., I have wormed myself into the confidence of Dale Wacker. He has rented a room in the Main Street Block, and started into the mail order business. An old fellow is sending out circulars for him, and they have got a bunch of printed matter from the *Eagle* Job Print, and he ordered one thousand watches from the city last night."



## CHAPTER XXIV

### AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

"If Markham were only here!"

Frank Newton said this, with a sigh in a fervent way. His mother had some household duties to attend to, and had asked to be spared from the office for the rest of that afternoon. Frank had accompanied her as far as the neat, convenient cottage they now claimed as home.

"Yes, Frank," she said, in quite a sad tone, "it is a pity he is not here to share our good fortune, just as he did your first hard efforts to establish business."

"That business is certainly a winner now," said Frank. "Mother, I feel it my duty to take a day off, or even two, if necessary."

"To look for a trace of Markham?"

"Yes."

"That would be only right, Frank."

"It shall be to-morrow," said Frank. "Good-bye till supper time."

Frank walked slowly back to the office review-



ing the immediate past of the mail order business, and speculating as to the demands and prospects of the future.

“Sense and system” had worked wonders in the past few days. With the recovery of the missing money Frank had been enabled to take up his old plans afresh.

The catalogues were rushed to a finish. He paid up all the small accumulated bills, and ordered fresh supplies from the city. He put himself in touch with attractive novelty markets, and there was scarcely a mail that did not bring a proposal to have him advertise and sell some catchy mail order specialty.

Haven Brothers increased their advertising for him. Then Frank had conceived a clever follow-up system for both prospective and old customers. He took care to sell just what he had advertised, and there were no complaints.

The wire puzzle was still the leading seller of his list, but the apple-corer, strengthened by the special notices Markham had suggested, was beginning to take hold, too.

Things looked very fair and prosperous for Frank that afternoon. The only depressing feature was the continued absence of Markham and the mystery surrounding it.



Frank had hurried up to get the day off he now promised himself. There had been so much to do. Even now he was due in the city to talk over a proposition with a big manufacturer there. This gentleman offered to furnish Frank free an eight-page illustrated insert for his catalogue and special buying terms, if he would push the goods actively.

The loss of the mailing lists had been severely felt at first. Mrs. Ismond's bright wits, however, had quite solved that difficulty. She continued to send out circulars from the country papers that were exchanges on the Pleasantville *Herald* list.

"The business is growing fast," reflected Frank. "Those who buy once, very often write for some article I haven't got in stock. Why not run a special purchasing department? It looks very much as if this business will some day run into a great big mail order house, selling everything and having a warehouse of its own. Hold on, son — what's the hurry?"

A bareheaded, wild-eyed youngster turning a corner had bolted into Frank with considerable force. Frank grabbed him quickly and swung to a rebound poise, or both might have measured their length on the walk.

"The very — fellow I — was after!" panted the urchin in a gasp.



"That so?" said Frank.

"Yes. Say, the fellows all like you."

"I'm glad. Thanks," smiled Frank.

"And sent me — to hunt you — and come back."

"Back where, son?"

"Office — mail order house. Riot!"

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired Frank, quickening his steps.

"Big fellow from the country. Been drinking. Smashed one of your windows. Went away. Came back and smashed in the door. Says he'll wreck the place."

"Why, what for?" demanded Frank, now walking still faster.

"Says he's a customer of yours. Says you swindled him. Says he'll wipe you out. That's it — run."

Frank was not only puzzled, but quite startled. He broke into a run. As he turned into the street where the office was located, he heard a mingled chorus of yells and cries.

A crowd made up mostly of boys filled the lawn space in front of the office. A glance showed to Frank the lower sash of the big front window in ruins.

The showcase outside lay tipped over on the



ground. The office door, with an upper panel slivered, hung on one hinge. From inside the place there came slamming, crashing sounds.

Frank realized that something serious was happening. He could not imagine what it could be. He was not the boy, however, to remain inactive while a wanton destruction of the little personal property he owned was going on.

"Here he is!" cried an eager voice.

"Say, Newton, don't go in there. The man's wild, crazy. He'll half kill you."

"We shall see about that," retorted Frank, grimly.

He parted the excited crowd and sprang past the threshold of the dismantled door. His eyes flashed as he took a glance about the place.

A waste basket had been kicked to the other side of the room, littering the place from end to end. A file cabinet had been upset against his desk. Packages of circulars ready for the mail had been hurled pell-mell against a partition.

The author of all this reckless riot was just now pulling at some temporary shelves crossing a corner of the room, holding boxes of envelopes. All came down with a crash as Frank shouted sternly:

"Stop that — what are you doing?"



"Huh!" growled the worker of all this mischief. "I'm cleaning out this place."

He was a husky, big-boned farmer-looking man of middle age.

Frank saw that he had a wicked eye. He also discerned that the fellow had been drinking heavily.

The stranger put his foot across a wicker basket and crushed it to splinters.

"What — what you got to say about it," he demanded, facing on Frank.

The big mailing table stood between them. The fellow leaned upon it as he stared insolently and savagely at Frank.

"I happen to be the proprietor of this place," remarked Frank.

"Whoop! you are?" yelled the man in a sort of frantic joy. "You're the mail order shark, are you? Here's luck. Better than smashing your traps. Say, I'm going to eat you!"

The man made a pounce around the table to catch Frank. His big fists warned the latter. The fellow in his present condition was positively dangerous, and was four times as big and strong as Frank.

"Hold on," cried Frank, seeking to temporize, but still keeping his distance by following the table



and keeping its broad surface between them. "What do you mean by this riot and destruction?"

"Let me get you once, oh, let me just get my hands on you once," grated out the man, with a savage crunching of his teeth, "and I'll tell you all about it. Won't come to time, eh? Then — I'll come to you!"

Now excited, alarmed boyish faces peered in at the door and window.

"Run for it, Newton," advised a quick voice.

"Call the police — there'll be murder done here soon," gasped another voice.

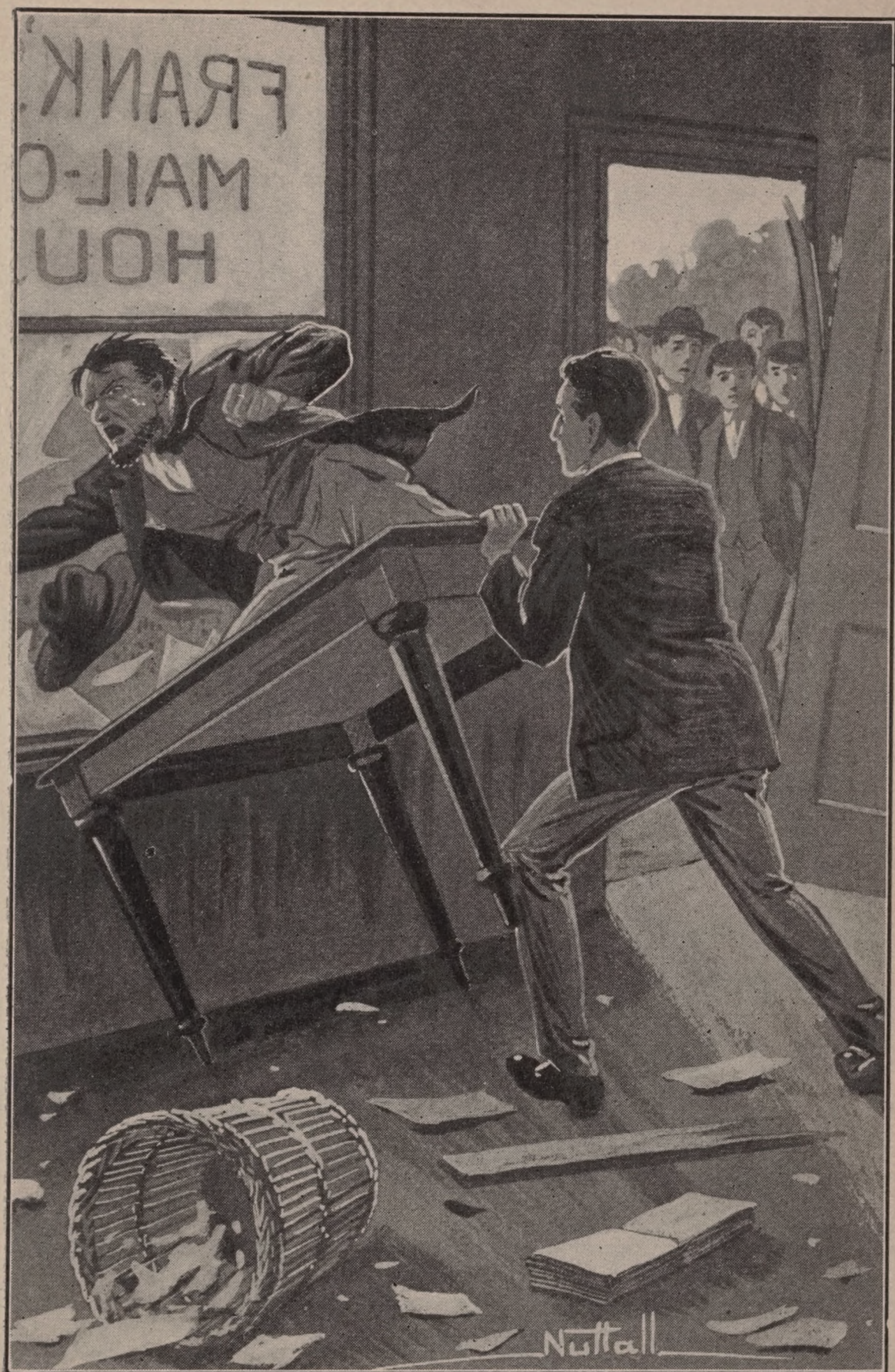
The stranger had sprung to the top of the table, poised to next spring upon Frank and put a stop to his retreating tactics.

He staggered as he tried to hold his footing. Frank acted quickly.

Jumping to the farther end of the table he seized its edge, gave it a lift and sent the troublesome intruder sliding off his balance on a sharp slant.

Crash! the fellow struck the half-shattered front window and went through it headlong.





THE FELLOW STRUCK THE HALF-SHATTERED FRONT WINDOW AND WENT THROUGH IT HEADLONG.—Page 212.







## [CHAPTER XXV]

### TROUBLE BREWING

FRANK was astonished at the ease and rapidity with which he had dumped his troublesome visitor clear out of the office.

"Good for you Newton!" hailed an approving chorus of voices.

"Look out for him!"

"No, he's got all he wants."

Frank parted the excited ring surrounding the ejected visitor. There lay the big, brawny fellow, quiet enough now.

"He's dead," pronounced one awesome voice.

"No, only stunned," dissented a second speaker.

"Yes, that is the case," said Frank.

In falling the man had struck a row of white boulders edging a flower bed. There was quite a contusion near one temple and he was bleeding at the nose.

"The man's hurt," said Frank. "Some of you help me lift him onto the grass, some one go for a doctor."



"No need," sharply spoke a bystander — "here's the police."

"Make way there, what's the rumpus here, anyhow?" challenged a stentorian voice.

Frank felt relieved. The speaker was the town marshal. The gathering had been reported to him and he had hurried to the spot.

The marshal dispersed the crowd. Two assistants brought a litter and marched off with the insensible man upon it. Frank closed the office door and barricaded the window as best he could.

Then he accompanied the marshal to the town lock-up. The prisoner was taken to a cell and a physician was called. By and by the marshal came back to Frank. He had a wallet, pocket knife and other little articles in his hand.

"Only stunned, the rest of it is what he's drank," he explained. "No need of worrying, Newton. He's got over two hundred dollars in this pocket-book, so we'll make him meet your bill of damages. What will it be?"

"Oh, from ten to twenty-five dollars."

Bob Haven had heard of the trouble and soon joined Frank, and helped him to get things back into order. A carpenter was called on to repair window and door.



“Sort of queer — the fellow making a break on you this way,” suggested Bob.

“It mystifies me,” confessed Frank.

“You don’t suppose he could be one of your old apple-corer customers, do you?” inquired Bob.

“Hardly. He acted like a man having some solid grievance. Here’s the marshal coming. He may have some inkling of the fellow’s motive.”

The marshal looked quite grave as he came down the walk and beckoned Frank out of the office.

“That man’s name is Halsey,” he said “and he comes from Westboro. Newton, he makes some pretty serious charges against you. Says he has been badly swindled.”

“Not by me,” declared Frank. “There must be some mistake.”

“He says not. He claims he sent some money to you and got a worthless article in return.”

“Let me see the man at once,” urged Frank. “His charge is utterly unfounded. I am not in business to defraud people, but to make regular customers of them.”

“We all know that, Newton,” said the marshal in a kindly tone.



Frank readily accompanied the marshal. When they reached the police station he was taken down stairs into the lock-up.

"Hi, let me out of here, will you?" demanded his recent visitor, noisily jangling the door of his cell.

"Keep quiet, you," ordered the marshal. "Here's the young man who runs the mail order business here in Pleasantville."

"Oh, is it?" cried the prisoner, with a savage stare at Frank. "Let me out, officer. I want about two minutes chance at the miserable swindler."

"It will pay you to act with some reason," warned the marshal. "Now then, you made the charge to me that you had been swindled."

"Outrageously," cried the prisoner.

"Give us the details. Young Newton has the confidence of everybody in Pleasantville, and we don't believe he would do a dishonest act."

"Don't?" flared up the prisoner. "Why, I've got the proofs. I got a circular a few days ago, saying that I had been selected as the man in Westboro to receive a full-size hunting-case watch and chain, cut shown, for eleven dollars, provided I would show it to my neighbors and advise them to buy."



"Never sent out such a circular," asserted Frank.

"I sent the money. The watch came yesterday evening. It was a five-cent toy watch, tin cases, paper face, no works."

"Where is the circular you speak of?" asked Frank.

"I left it at home. It was from the United States Mail Order House, Pleasantville —"

"Oh," interrupted Frank with sudden enlightenment. Then, turning to the marshal, he added: "This man probably tells the strict truth, but my business advertises only as 'Frank's Mail Order House.'"

"Then there's two in Pleasantville?" demanded the prisoner.

"I think so, yes," answered Frank. "I shall soon find out. At any rate, you have made a mistake in charging me with this swindle. You have damaged my office, and you must pay for it."

"Son," eagerly ejaculated the prisoner, pressing his face close to the iron bars of his cell door, "you find me the right swindler, and give me a brief interview with him, and I'll pay your bill twice over."

"We'll let you know in a little time," said the marshal, moving off.



“And now for the United States Mail Order House,” said Frank to himself, as he left the village lock-up. “Of course that means — Dale Wacker.”



## CHAPTER XXVI

### MYSTERIOUS STET

MAIN STREET BLOCK was the oldest business building in Pleasantville. It was here, according to Stet's brief report, that Dale Wacker had gone into the mail order business.

Frank attended to some necessary writing at the office. Then he went to Main Street Block. Downstairs the street floor of the building was occupied by stores that did a good trade. The upper floors, however, were only partly occupied.

Frank went up the dusty stairs to the second story. Here were a photographer, a surveyor, and a tailor.

Frank ascended the last flight of stairs. When he arrived at their top he found a small hallway ending at a door.

"Why," he said, "this floor is not divided off into offices. Looks as if it had been used for a lodge room. Yes, there is a peep-hole in that door. I'll knock, anyhow."

Frank did knock. He heard some fumbling at



a dirt-grimed window at one side of the hall. It moved slightly in as if set on hinges.

Then there was dead silence. Again he hammered at the door. A slight snap suddenly sounded. This was caused by the cover to the little circular hole in being shot back.

"What do you want?" sharply demanded the voice of some one behind the hole, invisible for the darkness of the closed in room or entry beyond.

"Is this the United States Mail Order House?" asked Frank.

"The what?"

Frank repeated the magnificent-sounding name.

"Never heard of it."

"Well, then, is there a Mr. Wacker here?" persisted Frank.

"No. Nobody but a sick old man. Go away."

"Hold on," said Frank, but the wicket went shut with a sudden snap.

"Of course this is the place," thought Frank. "That's something to know. Hello —"

Five steps down the stairs Frank started. Something had struck his shoulder. As he turned he noticed the window being pulled to. Also at his feet the object that had struck him.

It was a little piece of tin — around it was tied a fragment of coarse manilla paper. Frank picked



it up. He slipped it into his pocket and descended to the street. Turning the corner he untied the paper. It was scrawled over, and read:

“Keep cool. Be shady. Things working. Important. Midnight.”

Frank had to smile at all this serio-tragic phraseology.

“Stet wrote that,” he said. “Still the dark and mysterious detective! Probably enjoying it. He usually means something though, for all his extravagant ways of mystery. That means he has news to tell me. But where does he expect to see me at midnight? And why midnight?”

“Ah! Brr-rr-r! Hist! Good old Stet! He’ll probably do something sensational soon, but meantime I must pursue my investigations.”

These did not result in much. Frank went to the post-office. The postmaster told him that twice a day either Dale Wacker or an old man who was evidently associated with him brought a great many letters to mail. In return they received as many as forty letters a day. They presented a good many money orders, always for the same amount — eleven dollars.

The afternoon was nearly gone by this time.



Frank called at the town hall but found that the marshal had gone home to sleep until midnight.

"I will see him bright and early in the morning," decided Frank. "He can't make any mistake by assuming that old lodge room to be the headquarters of the United States Mail Order House Swindle. Those fellows are taking some risks. They will be in for a sudden disappearance unless the marshal nabs them soon."

"Are you going to take a day or two looking up Markham?" his mother asked at the tea table.

"I can't to-morrow, mother," continued Frank—"other important business. I hope to get the day following, though."

Frank put in an hour on a small set of books he kept at home covering the mail order business. Then he went to bed.

Something disturbed him about two hours later, for, almost wide awake, he counted the strokes of the town bell. It was just twelve o'clock.

"Midnight, eh?" mused Frank. "That was Stet's dark and deadly hour. I say—if it isn't Stet on hand!"

Some pebbles struck the upper closed sash of the room in which Frank slept. Beyond the wire screen covering the lower half of the window Frank made out a form moving to and fro.

"Hist!" sounded out.



"Yes, Stet," said Frank, slipping out of bed, "I hear you. Well?"

"It's me," said Stet. "Lift up the screen, will you?"

"Oh, want to come in!"

"I don't, but I do want to give you something."

"Why, what is this?" asked Frank, as lifting the screen Stet shoved a round package into his hand.

"It's your missing mailing lists."

"And where did you get them?"

"Dale Wacker has been using them ever since he started in business," explained Stet. "Where he got them is easy to guess."

"From Markham, of course."

"That's it. This was my first chance to get away from them. Say, there's Wacker and his partner. They're up to the worst swindle you ever heard of. They've taken in a big lot of money. They're booked to leave to-morrow, so I sneaked the lists out of the outfit. I'm not going back to them."

"Why, then—"

"I'm going down to Hazelhurst," proceeded Stet.

Frank was surprised that Stet should mention the very place he had most in his mind.

"To Hazelhurst?" he repeated curiously.



"Yes. From something I heard Wacker say to his partner, I am pretty sure that Wacker has got Markham hidden away or a prisoner somewhere around Hazelhurst."

"Why, Stet," said Frank, "I have thought that, too. I was going there myself to-morrow, only some important business hinders me."

"Tell you what I'll do," suggested Stet; "let me see what I can find at Hazelhurst. There's going to be a big blow-up with Wacker & Co. to-morrow. As I have sort of been in with them, maybe it would be best for me to keep out of the way so I won't get hit with any of the pieces."

"What do you mean by a blow up, Stet?" inquired Frank.

"Splosion."

"Indeed?"

"Sure thing! Say about ten o'clock to-morrow morning you hang around Main Street Block, and see what a telegram I sent to-day is going to fetch the United States Mail Order House."



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE POST-OFFICE INSPECTOR

“Now then, my friend, behave yourself.”

“Haven’t I paid the damages?”

“You have, but don’t get into any further expensive mischief.”

“H’m!” observed the victim of Dale Wacker’s mail order swindle, “that’s to be seen, if I ever get my hands on the real fellow who robbed me. As to you, stranger,” to Frank, “just send in your bill double. Sorry I disturbed you, but we all make mistakes”

“No, Mr. Halsey,” replied Frank, “I only ask you to pay the cost of that window you smashed and the door you broke.”

“How much — let me settle it now,” urged Halsey.

“I’ll trust you,” said Frank. “I will send the bill when the carpenter gets the repairs done.”

The trial had come off. A small fine had been imposed by the village judge on Halsey for his disorderly conduct. The marshal had explained



to him that Frank was not the person who had swindled him. He added that very probably through Frank's investigation they would soon discover the identity of the United States Mail Order House.

"You can come with us, but you will have to curb your fighting proclivities," warned the marshal. "Here is where the law steps in, and you must not interfere with its course."

"I came a long way to get satisfaction," muttered Halsey. "Somehow, I'll have it too."

The marshal led the way, and they were soon mounting the stairs of Main Street Block. They proceeded quietly, so as to give no warning or create any curiosity with other occupants of the building.

"There is the door," said Frank in a guarded tone, as they reached the landing of the third story.

The marshal advanced and gave a firm resounding knock on its panels. They could detect a stir within. Then the wicket shot back.

"Who are you — what do you want? Thunder! it's the marshal."

Frank fancied he recognized the tones as belonging to Dale Wacker.

"That's who it is," answered the official. "Here, here I want a word with you, young man."



The wicket was shot as suddenly as it had been opened. They could hear a quick scramble in the room beyond.

"Open this door," loudly demanded the marshal, resuming his knocking.

"They won't do it," spoke up Halsey, advancing a step. "Say," lifting his ponderous fist, "I'll soon clear the way, if you say the word."

"No," responded the marshal, putting up a detaining hand. "We have no legal right to invade the premises. Whoever is in there, cannot escape. There is no other stairway leading to the street except this one."

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank.

"Why, you had better go back to the town hall with Halsey," advised the officer. "See the clerk, and let Halsey swear out a criminal warrant against Dale Wacker and others concerned in a swindling scheme at this place."

"All right," nodded Frank. "Come Mr. Halsey, let us make haste."

"I will save you any delay, gentlemen," spoke up a new voice.

All three turned, to observe a keen-faced, bright-eyed man who had come quickly up the stairs. There was a certain half-military, half-official precision to his make up that at once impressed Frank.



"Yes," continued the newcomer, coming forward on the landing as though he had a perfect right there, "I'll soon get action here. You are the town marshal, I believe?"

"That's right," nodded the officer, regarding the speaker in some wonderment.

"Well, I am a post-office inspector. Came on a telegram. Got the birds caged in there? Give me a few facts, will you?"

The marshal briefly recited his suspicions and the case of Halsey. The inspector as tersely told of a telegram the post-office department had received, exposing the operations of the United States Mail Order House. Frank at once decided that Stet was its author.

"No dilatory fraud order case here," observed the inspector briskly. "It's got to be a raid, I see. Here, let me have a try. In there!" called out the official in a loud tone of voice, pounding on the door panels, open in the name of the law, or we shall be obliged to use force."

There was no response whatever to this mandatory challenge. The inspector placed his ear to the door. Then he said sharply.

"Watch out close. I will be back at once."

"He's brought the locksmith with him," announced the marshal a few minutes later, peering



over the banisters. "Those government fellows act pretty swiftly when they make up their minds. We haven't the power that they have."

The inspector, arrived with the locksmith, ordered the latter to open the door.

Frank looked about him curiously as, the door once opened, all hands passed into the room beyond. Its tables were littered with envelopes, circulars and letters.

The big lodge chamber was partitioned off at one end by a cambric curtain. Here there was a couch, a small oil stove and some eatables and dishes, evidences of light housekeeping on the premises.

The inspector darted about from corner to corner, and into all the little apartments that had formerly been in service as lodge and rooms.

"H'm," he observed, coming back from his inspection to the others, "birds have flown."

He moved to an open window. Pendant from an iron shutter hinge was a strong portable knotted fire escape. Its ground end trailed into an inside court of the building.

"If you think you know the people who were here and who have certainly escaped," suggested the inspector to the marshal, "you had better get your men on their track before they leave town."



"All right," said the marshal glumly making for the door.

"Here, I'm in on that arrangement," observed Halsey.

The inspector with an eagle glance at the letters on the tables and a business-like air, sat down to look over a mass of correspondence lying before him. Frank went up to him.

"Can I be of any assistance to you, sir?" he asked.

"You helped in this thing. Yes, yes you can help me," said the inspector. "Take this note to the local postmaster, will you?"

The inspector wrote a few words on his own card. It summoned the postmaster. The inspector directed that official to deliver all future mail of the Wacker outfit to himself or his representative.

When the postmaster was gone the inspector impressed Frank into service. This consisted in sorting out the letters and taking down the names of the persons who had been swindled.

"Now you can go for the marshal, if you will," said the inspector, about an hour later.

Frank found that official just returned from an unsuccessful search for Dale Wacker and the old



man with the big beard, his presumable partner, whom Stet had vaguely described to Frank.

"I must catch the afternoon train for the city and make my report to headquarters," said the inspector, when Frank returned to him with the marshal. "I want you to put a trustworthy custodian in charge here until we can send a regular man to close up the matter, and start after those swindlers."

"I'll put one of my deputies in charge," said the marshal. "As to Wacker and his partner, they're probably safe and far by this time."

The inspector regarded the speaker with a half-pitying, half-contemptuous look.

"That's as may be," he observed, "for the present. We don't let matters drop that easily, ourselves. There's something you mustn't forget of-  
ficer: When the United States Government gets after a guilty man, if he fled to the furthest corners of the earth, we never let up till we find him."



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A HEART OF GOLD

IT had been a strenuous day for Frank. He and his mother had put in double duty at the office that afternoon. Everything in the mail order business was moving along smoothly. Only this complication of Dale Wacker and Markham comprised a disturbing, unsettled element in the situation.

It was a beautiful moonlight night. Frank enjoyed the quiet of the hour after the stirring turmoil of the day, and prolonged his stroll. Almost instinctively his footsteps led him in the direction of the scene of the main commotion of the day — Main Street Block.

"Hello," said Frank suddenly and in some surprise, as, passing its gloomy entrance, he observed a solitary figure seated on a step in its shadow.

Frank recognized the man whom the marshal had appointed as custodian of the raided mail order concern up-stairs.

"Oh, that you, Newton?" spoke the man in a somewhat embarrassed way.



"Yes," replied Frank, "just headed for bed. Enjoying the fine evening?"

"Well," said the custodian slowly, "I can't say I am. Sort of lonely. Don't be in a rush. Dull and sleepy hanging around this desolate old barracks."

"Why don't you go to bed, then?" suggested Frank. "There's a comfortable cot upstairs there."

"Ugh," responded the custodian, with a grim shudder—"catch me!"

"Why, what's the matter?" pressed Frank, discerning that something really was wrong.

"I believe the place is haunted. I have heard some awful groans."

Frank was interested, and finally said he would go with the watchman and make an investigation. For quarter of an hour they found nothing, then Frank discovered the form of a man lying in the bottom of a disused coal chute. The man was in great pain. Much to the youth's amazement the fellow proved to be Gideon Purnell.

Frank questioned the rascal and found out Purnell had been Wacker's partner in the dishonest mail order scheme. Purnell had fallen down the chute while trying to escape from the marshal. His back was injured and the fellow was in a dy-



ing condition. He begged Frank to take him to some place where he could die in peace.

"I am sorry for you," said Frank. If you really are badly hurt —"

"Don't doubt it. I know what I'm talking about," said Purnell. "I've only a few days left."

"I want to do right," said Frank slowly.

"Then help a poor, broken wretch to die in peace," pleaded Purnell.

"I'll be back soon," said Frank simply, deeply affected himself.

Frank acted on an impulse he could hardly control. He ran to the Haven home and roused up Darry and Bob. There was animated explanation and discussion.

Half-an-hour later, secret and stealthy as midnight marauders, the trio of friends wheeled the Haven Brothers' delivery hand cart down the alley behind Main Street Block.

"Bet the fellow played you — bet he's made off," predicted Bob.

However, they found Purnell just where Frank had left him, only insensible now. They lifted him, a dead weight, into the cart. Then Bob, piloting the way, warned Frank and Darry of late pedestrians, and thus they reached Frank's home.

"Where am I — in a hospital?" spoke Purnell



weakly, arousing from his stupor an hour later.

"You are at my home," said Frank, coming to the side of the comfortable bed where the sufferer lay.

"Oh, no! no!" panted Purnell. "Let me hide my head with shame — let me die. In your home — under the roof of the people I ruined — robbed! Heaven have pity on me!"

"Don't think about that," said Frank soothingly. "We have tried to make you comfortable. In the morning we will get a doctor."

"Not a doctor, boy, no, but a lawyer," spoke Purnell in broken tones. "Boy, the meanest thing I ever did was to rob your mother of her fortune. Let the last thing I can do on earth be to give it back to her."

Frank remained by the side of the sufferer until early morning. Then Bob Haven came with a telegram from Stet.

"Hurrah! Markham is found!" cried Frank, reading the message. "Stet found him in a coal mine. He was a prisoner."

"Good for Stet!" said Bob.

"Just what I say. Markham is coming here. Bob, the skies are clearing, it would seem."

"I am glad of it, Frank."

The news about Markham was indeed true. He



had been kept a prisoner in an abandoned mine by an old man who was a tool of Wacker. The old man had been well-thrashed by Stet and had fled to parts unknown. Markham had quite a story to tell, as we shall soon see.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### CONCLUSION

“WELL, Newton, how goes the mail order business?”

“Famous!”

Frank answered the cheery hail of the Pleasantville postmaster like a boy telling the truth.

“Glad of it, and proud of it,” nodded and chuckled the good-natured old man.

He hustled out of the office as he had hustled in. Frank was growing to be an important customer of “Uncle Sam,” and his local representative catered to him.

In fact, it looked as though the increased postal business Frank had brought to Pleasantville would soon put that office in a new class, and thereby raise the official’s salary.

Two months of Frank Newton’s brisk business career had now passed away like some smooth, pleasant dream.

There was no regret with Frank for the kindness he had shown Gideon Purnell. That man had



died three days after Frank had removed him to the little cottage, blessing the friends who had taken him in charge, and leaving a signed confession that meant the defeat of Dorsett in his suit at law, and, therefore, the restoration of the defrauded widow's fortune.

For two weeks Markham had lingered about the house, a mere shadow of his former self. Then, good care and nursing set him on his feet again.

It was strange, but Frank could not find the heart to ask him to tell the secret of his life.

Markham referred to the matter of his disappearance, but in a vague, constrained way.

He stated that Dale Wacker had a certain power to do him great harm. So great was his dread, that he had consented to accompany Wacker away from the town. He had managed, however, first to drop the two hundred dollars where it was later recovered by Frank.

"Never mind what it was," explained Markham, "but that boy could do me great harm. I hoped to temporize with him. He took me to a lonely farmhouse. Here he had a friend as bad as himself. They locked me up, took the mailing lists away from me, and said I should never go free till I told what I had done with your money, which, somehow, Wacker knew I had in my possession



when he first overtook me. It was at the farmhouse that I made up that letter to Haven Brothers. I dropped it next day from a wagon in which they drove me to the mine."

"All right, Markham," said Frank, "there's more to tell I know, but you'll tell me when the right time comes, I am sure."

"The right time will soon be here, never fear," declared Markham, with emotion. "I have written a letter that will bring me a friend who will quickly clear up all this mystery."

Frank was content with this. As before he had absolute confidence in Markham. Never did a boy seem to deserve it more than this stranger. He worked early and late. He was singing, laughing, whistling half the time, happy and industrious. With the disappearance of Dale Wacker, a dark shadow seemed to have passed out of his life.

Bob Haven came in on the heels of the postmaster with some new letter heads. Frank looked them over with pleased satisfaction. In one corner was a list of references. Among them were three banks. This Frank had found a very valuable asset. The local institution had always endorsed him as reliable, and had secured permission from two other banks, allowing Frank's Mail Order House to refer to them.



The Havens had got some exchanges to put in a little reading article, and a cut of both the apple corer and the wire puzzle. All these little items had tended to build up the business.

The old office had been cut up into four rooms. A young lady kept the books. Frank had engaged a crippled young man as a stenographer, and he was a good one. Markham and himself had each an office to himself. Upstairs was the stock and shipping rooms employing four boys.

"System and sense" had been Frank's watch-words — the mail order business was a pronounced success on that basis.

"A gentleman to see you," spoke the stenographer, arousing Frank from a most pleasing day dream.

Frank looked up to greet a bronzed, earnest-eyed man of middle age. He was erect and military in his bearing.

"Is a young man named Markham employed here?" inquired the stranger.

"He is interested in the business here, yes," said Frank.

This would have been news to Markham himself. The wire puzzle had brought in lots of money. Frank had planned to tell Markham that



very evening that the latter should have a settled, tangible interest in the mail order business.

"I did not know that," said the visitor, with a quick sparkle in his eyes that Frank could not at all understand. "I very much wish to see him."

"He is away on some business," explained Frank, "but I think he will return within an hour."

"May I wait?" politely inquired the gentleman.

"Certainly," said Frank, "just step into his office."

"His office?" repeated the caller, again with a vivid flash of his eye.

Frank ushered the stranger into the next office, pulled a chair near the window, and handed him the daily paper from the city.

He resumed his work. Engrossed in this, he almost forgot about the waiting stranger. Frank finally discovered that over an hour had gone by. He stepped to the door of the adjoining office.

"I am sorry for your long wait, sir," he said, "but I feel certain Markham will be here soon. Is it anything I can attend to for him?"

"No," was the definite reply.

Just then Frank heard some one inquiring for him in the outer office. This seemed to be a day



for strangers. Two men whom he had never seen before entered his room.

One was a prim, sour-looking person. His companion more free and easy of manner at once addressed Frank.

"Is your name Newton?"

"Yes," responded Frank, none too well pleased at the man's familiarity.

"Believe you telegraphed to the reformatory at Linwood some time since about a boy named Welmore — Richard Markham Welmore?"

Frank started violently. He was greatly taken aback.

"Did I?" he said simply.

"You did," asserted the stranger promptly. "You've given us some trouble running you down. Welmore, under the name of Markham, is now in your employ."

"What of it?" inquired Frank, with dire forebodings of trouble.

"We want him, that's all, my dear young friend," broke in the other man. "Dangerous character, escaped criminal. This is an officer of the institution."

"What is your interest in this matter, may I ask?" demanded Frank.

"Distant relative, guardian, best friend. Sad



case. Left on my hands, cared for him, spent my means educating him. Repaid kindness by robbing me."

"That is a falsehood!"

Like a thunder clap the words sounded out. The waiting stranger in the next room spoke them. As he appeared in the open doorway, the man whose veracity he challenged looked as though confronted by an accusing nemesis.

"Welmore!" he almost screamed. He turned white as a sheet and cowered back, crestfallen and frightened.

"Yes, Jasper Lane — false friend, perjurer and thief," flashed out the other. "You cared for Dick Welmore? You expended your means on him? Where is the two thousand dollars I left you for his education?"

"Keep him off — don't let him touch me," pleaded the other man.

"Pah!" coarsely uttered the reformatory man, giving Lane a disgusted push to one side. "Mister," he continued, addressing Lane's accuser, "if there's been crooked business here, we didn't know it."

"There has been," affirmed the other. "My boy wrote me about it. I have hastened from the Philippines to right his wrongs. This creature,



Lane, accused him falsely, had him imprisoned. I secured the proofs of it before I came here to find my son Dick Welmore."

"Markham's father!" murmured Frank, with sudden enlightenment.

"Well," said the officer, "your boy will have to go with me, but if you can prove what you say, the court will not long hold him."

"You, Jasper Lane," spoke Mr. Welmore sternly, "you do not leave my side till you have righted my boy."

"I'll do it, I'll do it! Don't expose me, don't ruin my reputation!" whined Jasper Lane.

"There is Markham — Dick — now," announced Frank, as a cheery whistle sounded outside.

The next moment Markham entered the room, grew pale as he first noticed Lane, saw his father, and flew to his parent's arms with a wild cry of delight.

"Father," he said, leading Mr. Welmore towards Frank, "this is Frank Newton, the best friend I ever had in the world."

"Why not?" said Frank earnestly — "if your boy was my own brother, Mr. Welmore, I couldn't think more of him."



"It is noble in you to say so," said Mr. Welmore with considerable emotion.

"Father, Frank is the best boy in the whole world! One fellow in a million!"

"See your sign outside — Boy Wanted — I need a job."

"All right, in a moment. Sit down."

Frank did not look up from the letter he was reading to give attention to the applicant for work.

It was a very interesting letter for Frank, for it was from Dick Welmore, or Markham, as we have known him.

It told that the youth had been completely vindicated and released, and would be back at his business post of duty in the morning.

It also enclosed an item cut from a city paper, telling of the arrest and conviction of Dale Wacker for robbing street mail boxes.

The letter concluded by saying that Dick's father had decided to settle permanently in Pleasantville, and would be glad to invest some capital for his son in Frank's Mail Order House.

As Mrs. Ismond's case against Dorsett would probably reach a decision in the widow's favor during the next sixty days, Frank felt that there would,



indeed, be no lack of money to expand the successful enterprise he had built up from nothing.

"All right," said Frank now, for the first moment glancing at the boy he had requested to be seated. "Want work, do you — Why, Nelson Cady!"

"It's me, yes," confessed Frank's visitor.

"Why," said Frank, "I thought you were in Idaho?"

"Was — ain't now. Never will be again," declared Nelson.

"What's the matter — cowboy life too strenuous for you?"

"Say," said Nelson mournfully, "you see this old suit I've got on? You see the coat of tan on my face? That's all I got out of working ten hours a day on a lonesome ranch for a man who hardly gave me enough to eat."

"And you have come back to try something more congenial, Nelson?" insinuated Frank, with a friendly smile.

"Yes. I want work. Give it to me, will you?" pleaded Nelson.

"Have you been home yet?" asked Frank.

"No, nor won't go there until I have earned enough to pay back the money my father started me out with."



“I’ll hire you, Nelson,” said Frank readily, “only I must advise your father where you are.”

“All right, only if he tries to get me back home before I pay back that money he advanced me, I’ll run away again,” asserted Nelson.

Nelson Cady “made good” on his praiseworthy proposition, later on. The result of his decision to put aside roaming and adventure for practical business, will be told in another volume to be entitled “A Business Boy; or, Winning Success.” In that volume we shall meet Frank and some of our other friends again.

The following week Frank found that the business needed more space, and closed an advantageous lease for the third floor of Main Street Block.

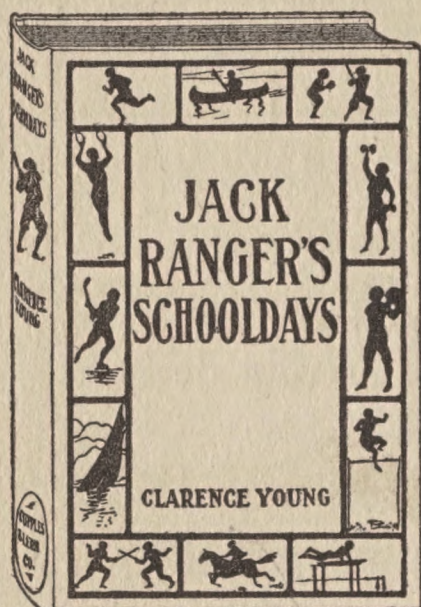
Right in the heart of the bustling little town, one morning, a big gilt sign announced to the public the new and enlarged quarters of FRANK’S MAIL ORDER HOUSE.

THE END.



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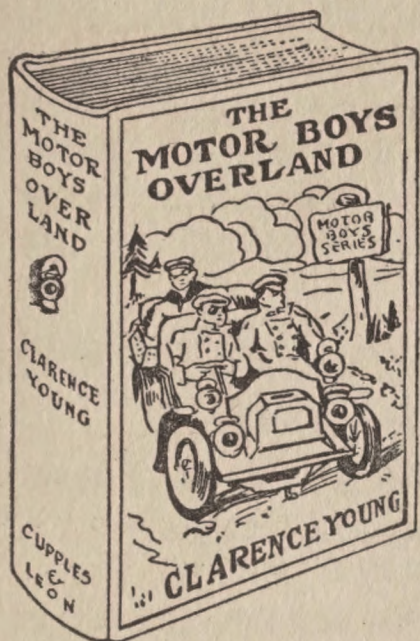
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